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PHILOSOPHIES OF MUSIC IN MEDIEVAL ISLAM

BY

FADLOU SHEHADI



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PREFACE

The nucleus of this work originated as a few short conference papers delivered over the past few years. A few of these appeared in the conference publications at the time, either in full or in the form of paragraph abstracts. We have made use of that material, but it has now been considerably developed, expanded and altered for the present purpose. The material for chapters six, eight and nine, however, appears here for the first time.

We have relied primarily on original sources, some of it in unpublished manuscripts located in Istanbul and Paris. There are very few secondary works on the philosophy of music, as such, of the period we are concerned with. However, for an overall guide to the writers and to certain topics on music, in general, in medieval Islam, the collective works of Henry Farmer are still *sine qua non*, even though some of these have been superseded by later scholarship. The editions and commentaries of Maḥmūd Aḥmad al-Ḥifnī on Kindi and Ibn Sina were very useful. We have found the works of Amnon Shiloah of great value, and, in particular, his book *The Theory of Music in Arabic Writings* proved to be an indispensable resource and companion. It is the most complete and up to date reference we now have. Also of value as a general survey is the substantial article by Werner and Sonne “The Philosophy and Theory of Music in Judaeo-Arabic Literature”.

In writing the Arabic names of the thinkers featured in our book, we have followed a principle of economy by using a short version of the name, and without diacritics. Other names of writers mentioned once or infrequently are given in the full diacritical transliterated form.

One often sees acknowledgements to one's family in scholarly books, but these are usually of the ‘thank you for your support, and for putting up with me during...’ kinds of expression. While I would undoubtedly want to do that, I have something much more concrete to acknowledge. For this project my wife Alison, my daughter Muna and my son Charles, singly and collectively took this Lisa Dolittle out of the gutter of the yellow pad, and Henry Higgensed me into the computer age. Alison counselled me patiently and persistently throughout my phobias, and taught me all the basics. Muna offered some simple solutions to simple—to her—problems. And for high level technical assistance I always called on Charles, a veritable wizard and high priest of that technological temple.

INTRODUCTION

I

In this general study we shall concentrate on the set of questions that make up what we call the philosophies of music of the thinkers in medieval Islam. The period we will cover begins in the ninth century with Kindi and ends in the fifteenth with Ibn Khaldun.

The philosophy of music is to be distinguished from what is called the theory of music. The theorist of music in this period is concerned with such things as the elements of music itself: tone, intervals, melody, rhythm, modes, transitions, composition, as well as musical instruments and their use in music theory and performance.

We see the medieval philosopher of music dealing with questions about the nature and origin of music, the nature of the theoretical science that inquires into music and all its elements, the relation between the theoretical and practical or applied sides of music, the place of music in the scheme of things: its relation to parts of the Cosmos, such as the natural elements, numbers, the celestial spheres, the seasons, as well as its relation to the humors of the body, and the emotions. The effects of music on character and behavior were also discussed by the Islamic philosophers

All these very familiar Greek topics passed on to the medieval thinkers. Greek ideas were repeated, developed and adapted by the Islamic philosophers, much as they did with the many other areas of Greek thought. In the philosophy of music Islamic contributions were mostly to important aspects of theory rather than global theory as such.

On the other hand, there were a set of issues which engaged the Islamic thinkers that concerned the relation between music and Islam, more specifically, issues related to the question of whether a good Muslim should be allowed, from the point of view of Islamic Law as well as general reason, to listen to music. And if listening is to be permitted, then to which kind of music.

We have often maintained that the area of Islamic thought which dealt with the relation between Islam and different elements of knowledge and culture, some foreign some indigenous, some threatening some enriching, is the one area of thought where we find Islamic thought most distinctive, most itself, and fairly original. For example, there is more cultural authenticity in Islamic philosophical theology

than, say, that almost ritualistic repetition by generations of Islamic philosophers of the Neo-Platonic scheme of being.

The same can be said about the inherited Greek philosophies of music. As we shall see in Part One, there is a mastery in the restatement of Greek thought, and much elaboration and refinement, but one still feels almost entirely in a Greek world. When Muslim thinkers concern themselves with the integrity of Islam, a different breeze is blowing. Whether they are taking the narrow or the more open road, their arguments spring from the soil of live cultural concerns, although this does not necessarily make them better arguments. And there are plenty of the kind which simply quote some authoritative source or other. Part Two of this book concerns itself with the issues relating to Islam and music.

Most of the thinkers we discuss in Part One have written on both the theory and the philosophy of music. We obviously have included them in our study because of their work in the philosophy of music. On the other hand, people like Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Urmawī (d.1294), author of the influential *Kitāb al-Adwār*, and *al-Risālah al-sharafiyyah*, is essentially a music theorist. Others, such as Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, and his son Ishāq (d. 804 and 850, respectively) are most famous performers who influenced both performance and certain aspects of music theory. But none of these three people discussed the philosophic questions we are concerned with. As a result—except for a brief reference to al-Urmawī—they and others who are ever-present in the scholarly works on music in medieval Islam, are unhappily not with us.

The writers we have chosen need not have been consciously writing ‘philosophies’ of music, nor need they have been known in the history of thought as philosophers, although clearly some are. Yet insofar as they discussed some or all of the questions we tucked under that label, they honor us by their presence in this book.

Lest it be thought that we are putting the cart before the horse, by deciding on the questions first, then using the label, it just happens that those set of questions have been center stage in the writings of classical and medieval philosophers. And since the material, by contrast with what music theorists write about, is philosophical in nature, we have no qualms about the topical mapping we have chosen for our inquiry.

II

Our study is limited to a particular period in Islamic civilization, the medieval classical period. But ours will not be a historical study in the sense which has dominated research in this field, namely, research to uncover influences and origins, although there is a very important place for this kind of task.

In the case of philosophy, however, one does not do proper justice to a philosophic text by simply making historically factual statements about its content. This is most certainly not to say that tracing historical ancestry should not be done. It can be undertaken either together with the philosophic study or instead of it, if one so wishes, but it would then be incomplete if this is all that is done. Clearly there are cases, depending on the specific objective one has selected for oneself, when the historical context is essential to the philosophic study itself. But there is always more that we owe to a philosophic text than just historical anchoring.

Thus without neglecting influences and origins, our study will be primarily a presentation of a philosophically coherent statement of the thought of the writers chosen, a philosophical clarification of their central ideas, and, where judged necessary, a critical evaluation of their main lines of argument. Such faults as must inescapably mar our effort to achieve these goals should be charged to me not to the approach I have chosen.

III

The Greeks set much of the agenda for the philosophers of music in medieval Islam, as they did for most of the rest of Islamic philosophy. And there are mainly three sources of influence. (1) Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans who analyze music (and all else) in terms of numbers and numerical ratios, for this made possible the vigorous science they wanted to establish. (2) Aristoxenus¹ and his school who, equally eager to make a precise science of the study of music, nonetheless consider its basic phenomena to be what can be discerned by human sensory perception, namely, such things as tones and intervals

¹ I gratefully acknowledge Professor Richard Sorabji's directing me to an appreciation of the historical importance of Aristoxenus for this discussion.

that can be heard. And (3) Plato and Aristotle whose influence, direct or indirect, extends throughout the wide spectrum of ideas on the many questions of the subject. We shall note in the proper place in our discussion, and in more detail, some of the many points of influence.

Of the philosophers in Part One, the influence of these Greek sources will be evident. Pythagorean ideas will be encountered in the thought of Kindi, the Ikhwan al-Şafa and Katib. Some others writers in this tradition are mentioned in Chapter One. Aristoxenus will surface in Farabi and Ibn Sina. Among others who might be grouped with them one can mention Ibn al-Akfānī, al-Urmawī, and Mubārak Shāh who wrote an important commentary on al-Urmawī's *Kitāb al-adwār*. Plato and Aristotle will pervade throughout, although Farabi will be seen to be especially indebted to Aristotle.

We shall see this indebtedness to the Greeks in the many topics discussed, especially in Part One: the nature of sound; the nature of music; its place among the sciences; the relation between theoretical and applied knowledge in music; the correlations between music, on the one hand, and the arithmetical, the astrological, the meteorological, the biological; the effects of music on the emotions, on character, on behavior, and on health.

Islamic thought has unquestionably been fertilized and enriched by its Greek heritage, but one wonders at times how much space it had left for itself in which to maneuver. Perhaps a similar point can be made about Islamic thought on issues touching Islam. It may have been more 'authentic', but it was still circumscribed in the way religious thought often is.

Not that the writers in Part Two escaped commonality with the Greeks. For the application of moral judgement to the arts is part of the legacy of Plato. But this commonality is not the same as historical influence. A religion such as Islam which is inherently encompassing of every aspect of human life, will all of its own want to be prescriptively preoccupied with the believer-listener exposed to what is thought to be a most potent and potentially dangerous force on emotion and behavior.

The thought on the issues pertaining to the permissibility of listening to music is Islamic in substance and style, and not only in the case of those arguments that rely on the authority of the Qur'an and Ḥadith. For the issue of listening to music in Islam is an issue about music in passing. It is above all the issue of what constitutes the life that is directed towards God in every belief and every deed. It is the issue of either following the Straightforward Path, or being lured away by all kinds of potent wordly pleasures and frivolous diversion,

including (some) music, and thus falling into depravity. And the controversy over music is a controversy over whether this or that kind of music leads in the one direction or the one opposite.

The puritanical strand in Islam considers listening to music like the partaking in games, as mere play and diversion. There is also a more specific concern which is rooted in the association of listening to music with drinking wine and engaging in (illicit) sex. The pleasures of listening to music, engaging in sex and drinking wine are seen by some, simply, as different forms of passion, and therefore for that reason dangerous. Whoever submits to them is swept by their power and diverted from the Path of God.

This topic of the permissibility of listening to music belongs to the philosophy of music on two counts. The first is that the issue of passing judgement on behavior, including listening, is a philosophic-moral issue in the broad sense. It is a part of the moral philosopher's concern with morality in art. Specifically in the case of Islam, it is an issue in religious morality. It is interesting to note, however, that in Islam this controversy concerns primarily the 'consumption' of music not so much its creation or performance. It is primarily the religious-moral duties of the listener that are the issue, and less the public policy issue of directly regulating art in society.

Secondly, the moral-religious concern with listening to music follows directly from, or is a corollary of the belief in, the power of music and the concern about its effect. And we have already said that the question of the relation between music, emotion, moral character and behavior is one of the questions that have been discussed by the philosophers ever since antiquity.

As we shall see the only fruitful way in which the question of the permissibility of listening to music can be discussed is at the specific level: which music and under what circumstances. To ask, in a general way, whether one should listen to music is as fruitless as asking whether one should listen to speech. Like a double edged sword music's power can cut in two directions. Al-Hujwīrī expresses this well when he says that "Audition is like the sun which shines on all things, but affects them differently....; it burns, it illumines or dissolves."²

III

What should one call the phenomenon the philosophies of which we

² *Kashf al-mahjūb*, pp. 406-407

discuss? This may seem like an odd question, in view of the fact that we have already titled the book as the philosophies of *music*. The question is occasioned by the fact that there is no single univocal generic term used in medieval Arabic about that family of related phenomena all of which share sounds having pitch, duration and some degree of structure. Yet the scholarly writers on the subject in whatever language, need a general denotative class name with which to refer to this sonic family that does not mis-describe that of which they speak.

The late Lois al-Fārūqī in her informative article “The Sharī‘ah on Music and Musicians” shows sensitivity to this problem of terminology. One “problem of terminology”, she says, “deals with the question of what is and is not ‘music’ in Islamic culture”.³ Then in her table of “The status of Music in the Islamic World”, she groups Qur’anic chant and the call to prayer, along with pilgrimage chants, eulogy chants and chanted poetry with noble themes, all as non-*mūsīqā*. Listening to these is permitted in Islamic Law.

Then there is the group of types which *were* considered as *mūsīqā* according to Dr. al-Fārūqī. These include ceremonial music, caravan chant, military band music (all permissible), and sensuous song (forbidden). Now the problem is to find a term that refers to both groups, those that were and those that were not called *mūsīqā*. Assuming, perhaps correctly, that such a generic term cannot be farmed from the literature of the period itself, she proposes the coined expression “*handasat al-ṣawt*” (the engineering of sound).

We find the expression both too broad and unnecessary. It is too broad because it could apply to moans, advanced baby babbling and professors’ lectures, none of which are related to what one would call music.

But it is also unnecessary, for by Dr. al-Fārūqī’s own example, she uses the English term “music” throughout her essay, even in the heading of the very table of types that created the problem she tries to solve.

And this is perfectly proper. For in using the English word “music”, one is *pointing to* the phenomena about which the discussion revolves. One is not *reporting* what was done by the medieval Arabic writers. So long as the two functions are kept distinct, one has the practical convenience of referring (in English) to the constituent subject, while still being able to point out the vocabulary of the period, when that needs to be done.

³ In *Islamic Thought and Culture*, ed. Ismā‘il al-Fārūqī, pp. 27-52

Of the Arabic vocabulary for the phenomena we are calling music there are two, possibly three, main contenders: *mūsīqī* (or *mūsīqā*), *ghināʾ*, and *samāʿ*. Each one of these has narrow and wide meanings. We shall point out these meanings briefly now and in a general way, leaving the specifics to the body of the text. As a consequence of the multiple meanings for each of these terms, we have some hesitation with regard to attempts by scholars who propose one meaning as *the* meaning of any one of the terms in question.

The term “*mūsīqī*” was adapted by the Arabs from the Greek. The form “*mūsīqā*” is also used. In modern times the latter is the equivalent of the English “music”, and hence functions as the generic term. The last letter of the Arabic word could be read as either “ī” or “ā”, for the two dots under that letter that would form the “ī” are often omitted in the medieval manuscripts.

One of the uses of “*mūsīqī*” in the literature of the period, is for the theoretical science that studies the subject, itself a Greek inheritance. Kindi uses the term in this way, and this has encouraged some scholars to take it as its sole meaning. In this sense the term would appear in expressions like “*ʿilm al-mūsīqī*” (the science of music), or “*ṣināʿat al-mūsīqī*” (the art-science of music). But it is also used for music as the performed art, rather than the theoretical science. As such it is considered by some of the Arabic writers, the Ikhwan al-Ṣafa, for example (“*al-mūsīqā hiya l-ghināʾ*”)⁴, to be equivalent to *ghināʾ*, in its broadest sense. It is then a generic term for music.

“*Ghināʾ*” is an Arabic word, and in its non-technical sense it means “singing”. In one reference its etymological meaning is said to be the elevation of the voice.⁵ In the literature of the period it also came to be used for the high art of singing by those who favored it, and for the simpler sensuous kind of song by those who opposed it. In addition it seems to have been the best Arabic candidate for the generic sense. Thus we find it offered as the equivalent of “*mūsīqī*” in its generic sense. And in this sense it is not just limited to songs. Some discussions of *ghināʾ* include a discussion of instruments, their sounds and their uses as well. However, since by far the larger part of Arabic music is song, the generic use can still claim fidelity to its non-technical sense.

With some qualifications, we include “*samāʿ*” along with the above vocabulary, for the term names an audience activity, listening or audition, and not the phenomena of music themselves. Moreover, it

⁴ *Rasāʾil*, p. 188

⁵ Shiloah, *The Theory of Music in Arabic Writings*, p. 259

occurs primarily in the context of discussions of whether listening to music is permitted, and if so which kind. Therefore, it is born in the context of moral-religious judgement, not music theory and practice.

Furthermore, in the literature of sufism, or Islamic mysticism, it names a practice in which a certain kind of music is listened to in order to help the seeker attain his religious objective. Sometimes a mystical dance is undertaken at the same occasion. It is this original link with sufi practice which has given the term its primary connection with sufism.

Yet we do find discussions of *samāʿ* in which the whole spectrum of music is considered, and there is a sliding back and forth between the listening perspective and the variety of music one listens to. At such moments the term does not seem to be limited to mystical audition, nor even to audition as such, for it is concerned with the range of musics that one listens to.

However, strictly speaking, *samāʿ* does not directly name the phenomena we call music. One can say that it refers to these indirectly, as they are reflected in the mirror of audition.

IV

In Part One we discuss the thought of Kindi and the Ikhwan al-Ṣafa as the primary representatives in Islam of the Pythagorean school. For these Islamic thinkers, music has a relation of affinity to arithmetical and astral phenomena, and it is precisely such a placement of music that, for someone like Kindi, defines the task of the philosopher seeking theoretical knowledge of the subject. This knowledge requires that the philosopher uncover and understand the multiple relations between the musical and the non-musical. Kindi is a secular writer on music. Thus for him the effects of music are primarily on emotions and, via the humors, on health.

For the Ikhwan the connection of affinity between our music and the music of the spheres serves as a ladder for a spiritual-mystical ascent towards the higher world, and in this music fulfills its loftiest function.

In the thought of Farabi and Ibn Sina we find a moving away from Pythagoreanism in the direction of Aristoxenus. Farabi explicitly challenges the claim that the heavenly spheres emit any kind of sound, musical or non-musical. He thus turns the study of music to its primary substances, the musical sounds, the melodies that one hears.

This gives practical music both a temporal and what one might call a referential or instantiatonal priority over the theoretical. But the theoretical maintains its independence, since one does not do theory merely for the sake of practice.

Having banished the heavenly spheres from the picture as a fact and as a source for human music, Farabi now seeks the origin of the latter in the natural phenomenon of certain instinctive dispositions. Humans need to express their inner states as they go through life's pleasant and unpleasant experiences. They also seek to rest from toil, and to divert themselves from the fatigue and boredom of many of life's chores. Music naturally emerges from such soil; song first, and eventually the discovery and use of instruments.

Ibn Sina offers a fuller declaration of independence from Pythagoreanism. He declares his intention to study music in terms of its own principles and elements. The discussion of the origin of music begins with a functionalist account of sound, of meaningful sound. Animals and humans find themselves in situations in which they need to call to one another for reproducing the species, or to alert the other about danger, or to express to others what goes on within them. However, although music is a sub-species of the world of meaningful sound, it is not linked to any of the natural adaptive functions of meaningful sound, except perhaps that of conveying the affective side of experience.

In his discussion of the status of music Ibn Sina goes beyond the functional context and turns to the aesthetic analysis of music which is seen as primarily for the sake of providing the listener with enjoyment. Even in his poetics, and especially in the case of what he calls the lyrical poetry of the Arabs, by contrast with what he sees as the dramatic nature of Greek poetry, producing pleasure is the primary goal of poetry. In music, the pleasure includes the pleasure derived from musical sound as such, the pleasure from the structure of musical composition, and from the ways in which music imitates or expresses the affective. But the greatest pleasure derives from the formal or structural aspect of music.

Katib is a highly eclectic writer. He combines ideas from the Pythagorean school—Kindi in Islam—as well as Farabi. He states the inter-dependence of the theoretical and practical aspects of music in the tightest of terms, and is a strong advocate of the higher music-art which he contrasts with populist music. The former requires knowledge, while the latter can give pleasure to humans and animals alike, and no education of taste is required.

In Part Two we turn to the issue of the permissibility of listening to music in Islam. This is a vast subject on which there is enormous

literature. Authorities on the subject, both ancient and modern, have hashed and rehashed the issue as it concerns the interpretation of Islamic Law. It is perhaps generally agreed that the Qur'an has nothing that explicitly forbids *ghinā'*. Those who claim that it does as well as those who claim that it does not, have to engage in some interpretation of texts which do not always cooperate in establishing the thesis being championed. The Ḥadith, a collection of reports about what the Prophet said and did, contain more explicit stands on one or another of the kinds of *ghinā'*, as well as reports that require some interpretation to fit the one thesis or the other. The proponents of each side in the controversy, naturally claim that there are more Ḥadiths that support their view than the opposite. Some writers—Ibn^c Abd Rabbihi, for example—ignore the Ḥadiths that bend in the other direction, others—Ibn Taymiyyah—caution about the problem of their authenticity.

As a result neither side can claim decisive victory of a general sort for their side. Neutral kinds of song, such as the caravan leader's chant, are acceptable to both sides. The chanting of the Qur'an gets less unanimity. Those who oppose it are afraid that the melodic tier will detract from the message of the text. Or, when cantillation is approved, it is the simple voice modulation kind of melodic embellishment. Then there is the fear that the tunes of the non-Muslim People of the Book, namely, Christians and Jews, might creep into Qur'anic cantillation. This is expressed in a *ḥadith*, according to which the Prophet urged that one read the Qur'an with the tunes of the Arabs and their sounds, not of the other People of the Book.

There is perhaps agreement that listening to sensuous (sensual) song should not be permitted because that sows the seeds of waywardness. Even mystical *samā'* is subjected to some strong attacks by those who claim that it is planted by the devil in order to turn people away from God, rather than towards Him, or, they say, that this *samā'* easily deteriorates into listening for the sake of play and amusement. These and the other kinds of music will be discussed in the second part of our book.

We did not think that a general factual survey of the whole gamut of who-said-what-on-which-side belonged in our type of study. Accordingly, we have selected a few representative points of view on the question of the permissibility of *ghinā'*, and tried to present the arguments of each in a clear and cohesive way. In addition we attempted an evaluation of the merits and demerits of some of the supporting arguments.

Classificatory labels can be misleading. However, we did place the

first three thinkers we have chosen, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ghazali and Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, in categories of various degrees of strictness with respect to what and how much they will allow. By such a yardstick, Ibn Taymiyyah is the most restrictive, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi the most lenient, and Ghazali occupies the position of the moderate, in between the two.

In the final chapter we discuss three other thinkers, each of which brings something to the discussion which is different in some respect from what we had seen with the other three. Ibn Khaldun approaches the subject of music as a philosopher of history. He explains the rise of music as a later development in the life cycle of a civilization. When a measure of affluence and luxury has been attained, people want diversions, and sources of different kinds of pleasure. Music fulfills this need. Early Islamic society retained the virtues of the desert, with its severe attitude towards frivolous diversion. But music developed and flourished in spite of that restrictive attitude. As a craft music will be the first to go with the disintegration of a civilization. The forces that brought it on are of the same kind as the ones that will see it go, and these are secular socio-economic forces.

Majd al-Din al-Ghazali, the brother of the famous Abu Ḥamid, defends mystical *samāʿ* as did his brother, but his arguments are fresh and all his own. He assumes that there is a positive attitude on the part of the Prophet and other holy men, and thus argues that those who oppose *ghināʾ* are in effect opposing the Prophet and the holy men. He also discusses the propriety and impropriety of moving from some being the case to the conclusion that all is, or should be the case, about certain kinds of music.

Finally, we discuss Ibn al-ʿArabi, and interpret him as thinking of musical *samāʿ* as a subdivision of a broader kind of *samāʿ* which is given a cosmological form, according to which God in creating what is, did so as a result of His Speech, and it is through His creation that we may listen to Him and His word. This is the absolute kind of *samāʿ*.

Musical *samāʿ*, on the other hand is *tied*, tied to sound. Nonetheless, musical *samāʿ* can assist some seekers in their journey towards God. *Samāʿ* may be inappropriate for the novice, and is not needed by the elder gnostic, but it would be helpful to those in the middle of their journey.

PART ONE

GREECE WITHIN THE CRESCENT

Music in the Larger Scheme of Things

**Kindi
Ikhwan al-Şafa**

Focus on Music and Its Elements

**Farabi
Ibn Sina**

Music, Knowledge and Appreciation

Katib

CHAPTER ONE

KINDI

I. *The Place of Kindi*

Kindi (d. 870) is generally considered the first Muslim philosopher. But he is also the first of any of the Muslim figures to have written anything significant about the theory and philosophy of music, certainly of those writers whose works have come down to us. Those of note before him such as Y ūnus al-Kātib, Ishāq al-Mawṣilī and al-Khalīl Aḥmad¹ are said to have written on music theory in the narrow sense of the term, that is about melodies, rhythm and such. Besides, they put together collections of songs and wrote about singers and composers. But their works are not extant. We know about them from al-Iṣfahānī's *Kūṭab al-aghānī* and *al-Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm. At any rate, it does not seem as if they were interested in the philosophy of music.

Kindi as a music theorist wrote about melody, modes, rhythm, composition, the relation between words and music. But as a philosopher he was interested in the broader questions about music. He wrote on music as science, its theoretical and practical sides, on the place of music in the total scheme of things: its relation to astral phenomena, to the natural elements, to the seasons, the times of day, the humors of the body and the temperaments.² He also wrote on the effects of music on the soul by virtue of some of the above connections, and on the medical uses to which this multi-connected music can be put.

This makes Kindi the first Islamic writer to have given anchor to the Greek, primarily Pythagorean, ideas on music. It was Kindi who established in Islamic intellectual history the Greek tradition of discussing music as a mathematical science. For him the Greek term "*musiqī*" means the (Greek) theoretical science of music, while the practical side of music as performed is called *ghinā*³. His Pythagoreanism in music makes him the first in a line of subsequent writers, including the Ikhwan al-Ṣafa whom we discuss in our next chapter.

¹ See Farmer, *A History of Arabian Music*, pp. 83, 105.

² See the full chart of the various connections in the Appendix.

It would be of interest to mention a few of these writers in the Kindi-Pythagorean tradition in Islam. They are selected to show the spread in time from the Ninth Century, Kindi's own, down to the early Fifteenth Century, and are presented here without any attempt to compare and contrast the details in their views of the various connections between the musical and the non-musical.

Al-Jāhīdh (d. 869) is actually a contemporary of Kindi, and in his book *al-Tarbī' wa l-tadwīr* (*Squaring and Circling*) he has a brief section on music, one of the oldest in Islam, that links "the strings, the elements and the temperaments".³ Ibn Khurradādhbih (d. 911) makes the links primarily between the 'ūd strings and the humors of the body, noting the influence for purposes of therapy.⁴ During the second half of the Tenth Century the Ikhwan al-Ṣafa are the most important carriers of the Pythagorean tradition. Their views will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Hopping to the end of the eleventh-beginning of the twelfth century in Andalusia, we find Ibn Bājjah (d. 1139) in his *Risalah fī l-alḥān* (*Tract on Melodies*) with a fuller discussion of the correspondence between the proportions of celestial and earthly music and the usual connections between the strings of the 'ūd, the natural elements and the humors.⁵ Moving now to the Fourteenth Century, al-Ṣafadī (d. 1363) in his *Risālah fī 'ilm al-mūsīqī* (*Treatise on the Science of Music*) connects the *maqāmāt* (melodic modes)—not the strings of the 'ūd this time—with the zodiac, hours of the day, the colors and the humors.⁶ Finally, in the Fifteenth Century we have al-Ghuzūlī (d. 1412) and Ibn Ghaybī (d. 1435) who deal with the usual connections between the strings of the 'ūd, the elements and temperaments.⁷

One final point about placing Kindi's philosophy of music: it provides an excellent backdrop for Farabi's and Ibn Sina's rejection of such connections. Ibn Sina, in particular, reflecting Aristoxenian influence, will insist on the study of music exclusively in terms of its own elements as an auditory experience.

³ Shiloah, *The Theory of Music*, p. 95

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 193f.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 157

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 304-306

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 114, and p. 168 ff. for the two authors respectively.

II. Theoretical Knowledge of Music

According to Kindi, a philosopher discussing music has one primary aim, and that is theoretical knowledge. But a philosopher is also like a physician who uses knowledge in order to heal and maintain a state of health.⁸ This is the applied or practical aim of the philosophic study of music.

It surprises one at first that this medical use seems to be the primary example of the practical side of music cited in this part of his *al-Muṣawwītāt*, for after all Kindi himself was a *‘ūd* player and wrote a fingers exercise for his students.⁹ However, in his *al-Risālah al-kubrā fī l-ta’līf* he does talk about the performance aspect of music.

At any rate these two goals in the study of music, the theoretical and the practical, are a reflection of what, according to Kindi, are the two goals or two main subdivisions of philosophy itself as a discipline.¹⁰ We shall take each one of these in turn.

What is it to have theoretical knowledge of music?

One obvious answer is that one should understand the basic elements of music as given in music theory. Kindi’s essay *Fī khubr ṣinā’at al-ta’līf* is devoted to such topics as intervals, modes, melodic patterns and their use in composition. Sections of his other essays on music also discuss some of these topics, as well as the important topic of rhythm.¹¹ This is where Kindi does theory in the narrow sense. But this is a minimal answer to the question about theoretical knowledge. It is not what is distinctive in Kindi’s thought about music, nor is it what fully satisfies the philosopher’s quest, according to our author. There are different aspects of music to be known, and only one of these is supplied in music theory.

The fuller explanation of the philosophic knowledge of music can be stated in two interdependent ways. One comes from Kindi’s theory of knowledge and his classification of the sciences. The other comes from his metaphysics, and especially his cosmology which sees the interrelationship of the various aspects of reality, music and its instruments included.

⁸ *Muṣawwītāt*, p. 72

⁹ See Zakariyyā Yūsuf, *Mūsīqā al-Kindī*, p. 27

¹⁰ *Rasā’il al-Kindī*, Part II, p. 8

¹¹ See *Ajzā’* and *al-Risālah al-kubrā* in *Rasā’il al-Kindī al-Falsafīyyah*

In Search of the 'Illah

Following the Greek tradition, Kindi classifies music as one of the middle sciences, along with arithmetic, geometry and astronomy. These fall between the sciences below them, namely, the sciences of nature, and the science above them, the science of “what is not of (or what is beyond) nature”.¹² Clearly the basis for this hierarchical ranking is the idea of the levels of being which are studied by the respective sciences. Numbers, geometric figures, musical sounds and heavenly bodies are midway between what is sensible and changes, and what is supra-sensible and does not change.¹³

In the tradition of the genre of writing on the classification of the sciences this does not count as a major statement. What is significant about it, however, is that it seems to have provided Kindi with a framework for taking the further step of declaring the interrelatedness of the phenomena studied by these three-level sciences.

We shall see that Ibn Sina later will follow the same intermediate classification of music as a science, but will reject the interrelatedness that Kindi requires for the discussion of music, maintaining that those who make these connections between music, numbers, astral phenomena and human character traits have not understood the differences among the various sciences.¹⁴

For Kindi there is an epistemic and temporal priority of knowledge over practice, at least in the sense that one must know what to do before one does it.¹⁵ Furthermore, if one introduces the normative concepts of truth in belief and rightness in action, these must first be known to the mind before any action emerges in the sensible or tangible world. Action and the sensible world are here tied together in their status of posteriority. By contrast with what is known to the mind, action, as Kindi puts it, “is the sensible part” (“*al-ʿamal huwa l-qism al-ḥissī*”).¹⁶

Another basis for the priority of knowledge over practice is that in knowing what is true and what is right one knows the causal principle and one can offer a proof. This is a defining feature of knowledge. Many an individual might stumble on doing what happens to be right,

¹² *Muṣawwi tāt*, p. 70

¹³ *Rasāʾil* I, p. 111

¹⁴ See Chapter Four below, pp. 67ff.

¹⁵ *Muṣawwītāt*, p. 71

¹⁶ *Rasāʾil* II, p. 8

but can get no credit for doing the right because they do not know why that action was to be done.¹⁷

The rational explanation of the sensible world is always in terms of underlying causal principles. As an example of this, Kindi refers to the Ancient Philosophers who held that there is nothing in the sensible world which is not composed of the four elements. However, in Kindi's own metaphysics, following Aristotle, he adds a fifth causal principle, the *falak* or the celestial sphere. Whereas the four elements are material causes, as Aristotle had noted, the celestial sphere, according to Kindi, can only be an efficient cause.¹⁸ The *falak* is not only different in its function, but also in its nature. For whereas it has some properties in common with objects in the sub-lunar world, it is sufficiently different to warrant its classification as a fifth element. For example, it is neither heavy nor light, nor fast nor slow; neither is it dry nor moist.¹⁹

How does all this apply to the requisite knowledge of music?

The discussion of theoretical knowledge about music takes Kindi in different directions just because of his belief that music is significantly connected with different phenomena, and thus there are different things to know about music. One reaches towards mathematics to explain intervals in music. For the expressive character of music as heard one explores the dimension of the effects of music on the physiology and psychology of humans (and animals).

One might say that for the modern reader, there is nothing unusual so far. What is of special interest is that Kindi also moves in the direction of astronomy, astrology, meteorology, metaphysics and cosmology in order to explain certain aspects of music and musical instruments which one is tempted to call peripheral aspects; that is, peripheral to that primary aspect of music as a listened-to phenomenon. For example, Kindi singles out the correspondence between the number of strings on the *ʿūd* which is four and the four elements. Even the shape of the lute as semispherical is like the half-sphere of the heavens that we can see at any one time.²⁰ And although in most such references Kindi opens the discussion by saying that this is what the Ancient Philosophers thought, his attitude towards accepting the

¹⁷ *Muṣawwītāt*, p. 71

¹⁸ *Rasāʾil* I, p. 248

¹⁹ See *al-Ibānah ʿan anna ṭabīʿat al-falak mukhālīfah li ṭabīʿat al-ʿanāʾsir*, in *Rasāʾil*, Part II.

²⁰ *Al-Risālah al-kubrā*, pp. 135 f.

knowledge that came to us from the Greeks,²¹ gives one good reason for attributing to him the thoughts he is summarizing.

These different directions that Kindi takes are part of his epistemological promise to give the *‘illah*, or causal explanation, for the different things that need explaining in order to acquire theoretical knowledge. Kindi's essay on string instruments, *al-Muṣawwītāt al-watarīyyah*, has for its goal to supply the *‘illah* for the various aspects of music we have so far mentioned. And in the paragraph already referred to where Kindi says that there is nothing in the sensible world that is not composed of the basic elements, he immediately proceeds to praise those ancient proponents of this metaphysical principle for their intelligence in further devising musical instruments that by virtue of the selected similarities mediate between these elements, on the one hand, and the soul of humans as well as the bodies of humans and animals, on the other.²² Knowing these correspondences between the musical and the non-musical becomes part of what constitutes the theoretical knowledge that the philosopher seeks.

The Principle of Affinity

In his theory of knowledge and his move to understand music by its similarities to the non-musical, Kindi is thoroughly Greek, but he is particularly Pythagorean in specifically making the astral connections, and more generally in assuming that there is an affinity (*mushākalah*) among the various aspects of what makes up the *Kosmos*. However, unlike the Pythagoreans, he does not make numbers the universal principle that binds the cosmos.

Thus the nature of the philosophic understanding of music not only presupposes a theory of knowledge allied with a classification of the sciences, but it also presupposes a particular cosmology. For it is on the metaphysical supposition of a unifying affinity, and only within that context, that connections can be triggered to function as cause or *‘illah*. There are four strings on the *‘ūd* and there are four elements, but without the cosmology and the metaphysical assumptions such similarity between strings and elements by itself has no explanatory force. And it is the specifics of the affinities in a particular view—what makes it this affinity view rather than another—that decides which particular connections shall surface as causal principles.

In his commentary on the edition of Kindi's *Risālah fī ajzā' kha-*

²¹ See *Rasā'il* I, pp. 102ff. See also Shehadi "The Continuity in Greek-Islamic Philosophy" in *Arabic Philosophy and the West*, ed. by Thérèse-Anne Druart, pp. 19-25

²² *Muṣawwītāt*, p. 71

bariyyah fī l-mūsīqī, Maḥmūd al-Ḥifnī describes this view of Kindi's in the following way:

It is as if in this (view) he (Kindi) attempts to affirm the tight bond that exists between the scheme of things and (human) life in (both) time and place. Man is thus a part of the universe, linked to it, to its sky, to its earth, to its day, to its night...²³

This gives us the second way of answering the question about the theoretical knowledge of music advocated by Kindi. The first was the epistemic principle of finding a *ʿillah*. However, the second, the affinity that unifies, is not complete without the first. For while the principle of affinity discloses the relevant causal connections, the discovery of these does not count as *knowledge* without the (Platonic) principle that to know is to know the cause.

To the modern critic and philosopher of art it would seem very strange to think that the correspondence, say, between the shape of a musical instrument and the shape of the visible heavens, or the number of strings on the *ʿūd* and the number of elements should be of any significance in our knowledge about music. Yet if someone like Kindi antecedently believes that astral connections with the human world are to be taken seriously, then the noted connections with music could make sense.

The principle of connecting music with the extra-musical is not foreign to the modern aesthetician in the West. What else would the advocates of the pure aesthetic approach be rejecting? Given, say, the assumptions of cultural history, or the psychology or sociology of art, the modern critics who accept these assumptions have themselves often indulged in a mixture of some plausible and some wild extra-musical 'explanations'. Unless one is an advocate of the purely aesthetic approach, Kindi's astral and other connections would seem strange not because they are extra-musical, but because they commit one to astrology which many people do not take seriously.

III. *Analysis of Some of The Connections*

The Thickness of Strings

In the essay *Ajzāʾ khabariyyah fī l-mūsīqī*, Kindi discusses each of the four strings on the *ʿūd* in the following way.

²³ *Op. Cit.*, p. 48

Al-zīr, or the C-string, is the thinnest in dimension and the highest in pitch, and therefore, of the four natural elements, it has affinity with fire; "It is all soul and no body".²⁴ This is unlike *al-bamm* or A-string which is all body and no soul.²⁵ It is the thickest and lowest in pitch, and thus akin to earth. Of the seasons the C-string goes with summer, the A-string with winter. Kindi makes further connections with the quarters of the moon, quarters of the month, of the day, quarters of the *falak* (the celestial sphere), quarters of the Zodiac, the basic functions of the body (such as the digestive, the retentive), the faculties of the mind (such as the rational, the imaginative, memory), and moral character traits such as courage, cowardice, patience, etc...²⁶

The Number of Strings

Then there are connections of a different sort. In his *al-Muṣawwītāt al-watariyyah* Kindi considers the significance, not just of the thickness-pitch on a four stringed *ʿūd*, as in the previous examples, but of the number of strings as such, and on instruments as devised by the various peoples of the world. The latter point relates to what one might call the *Weltanschauung* of each people, as we shall see shortly.

For example, the Indians are said to have developed an instrument called the *kankanah* which has one string, for they believed that "the cause of the world is the (one) cause of the manifold (*al-maʿdūdāt*), so they tightened one string and one fret."²⁷ Furthermore, the one is a root number; also the joys of music come through one sense, the sense of hearing. The self which enjoys music is one, and must be stimulated by a numerically kindred source.²⁸

On the other hand, the people of Khurāsān found duality in all things: night and day, sun and moon, substance and accident, motion and rest, down through a long list of things that are dual. Accordingly, they made a two stringed instrument.

The Romans saw threesomes, and put three strings, and so on, up to the ten-string variety with Biblical David making his ten-stringed

²⁴ *Muṣawwītāt*, p. 85

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 87

²⁶ Werner and Sonne maintain that the Arab and Jewish philosophers worked out more details of the manifold effects of music than the Greeks ever did. They "went boldly and almost materialistically into physiological details". See their useful article "The Philosophy and Theory of Music in Judaeo-Arabic Literature", *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol. XVI, 1941, p. 273

²⁷ *Muṣawwītāt*, p. 73. See *Ibidem*. note 12 for the variant *kankalah*. Al-Jāhīdh also calls it *kankalah*: *Rasaʿil*, p.82

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

instrument. And of course here are plenty of tensome things to match including the ten fingers and the ten categories.²⁹

Farmer says that in the Andalus the *‘ūd* had five strings,³⁰ an innovation that did not spread to the East. One can only speculate that if Kindi had been born in the Andalus, he would have had to, for his own thinking, go looking for things quantuple to do the matching for the five strings. It is fortunate that things were the way they were, for there are more foursomes than fivesomes, and more interesting ones.

Yūsuf Shawqī says that Kindi assumed a fifth string for his theoretical work, but the *‘ūd* he used for playing had four strings.³¹

The Assumptions

In the case of the relations seen between the thickness and pitch of the *‘ūd* strings, on the one hand, and the metaphysical elements, on the other, the connecting principle is again an aspect of similarity, although in this instance not a numerical similarity. In the physics of the era, pitch was thought to be a direct function of thickness rather than of the rate of vibration. Thus the A-string, being the thickest, corresponds to earth which is the densest of the elements. The D-string is next in thickness and so corresponds to water. The G-string is the third away from the thickest, and is like air. The high pitch C-string is the thinnest of all the four. Thinness is akin to lightness which one would associate with the evanescent movement of flames, and is like fire.³²

The first temptation about all these connections is to say that they are based on a fallacy: that of considering a similarity in some respect between A and B as a sufficient condition for pairing them off in a theoretically significant way, when such similarity is at best a necessary condition. Why should thinness and lightness be associated with fire and not feathers. Or, think of my uncle's four belts. They range in overall thickness from the almost string-like to the broad and heavy. If similarity were the only consideration, there is nothing that the elements have which my uncle's belts do not have.

With that temptation behind us, we should recall the theoretical task Kindi is committed to. If the object is to explain the 'apparent' in terms of the assumed principles of reality, then comparing four strings

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 90f.

³⁰ Farmer, *op. cit.*, p. 154

³¹ *Risālat al-Kindī fī khubr šin ā‘at al-mūsīqī*, p.49

³² In the third essay the place of earth and water is reversed. We have followed the second and fourth essays.

strings with the four metaphysical elements is more to the point than some other foursomes one picks up on the street. In Kindi's assumed metaphysical world feathers and uncle belts are nobodies. They have no metaphysical status nor relevance. So it is on the antecedent assumption of a pre-Socratic metaphysics that certain similarities are the ones to select, but not others. Choice in pairing off with respect to similarity is pre-set within the limits and the terms of a given metaphysics. The thinness of a string does not become a match to fire, above all other candidates in the universe, but over the other three elements in the only serious metaphysical contenders, namely, those given in the pre-Socratic metaphysical view of the world. Given the four elements, the C-string, being the thinnest, is most like fire and least like earth. This is what we meant when we said earlier that the specifics of the metaphysical view determine which connections shall surface.

This theoretical circumscribing of the perimeters of choice is in some ways like the experiment from the literature on *Gestalttheorie* in which one is offered two diagrams, one with an edgy angular configuration, the other with lyrical flowing lines. Then you are asked to attach each of two meaningless sounds to one or the other of the drawings. "*Takete*" would be more appropriate for the angular-edgy diagram, and "*uloomu*" would fit the flowing one best. The aspect of formal similarity across the realms of sight and sound is the obvious governing principle in the choice, but one is not expected to go outside the terms of the experiment, just as, in Kindi's case one would not consider going outside the perimeters of his theoretical connectings.³³

When Kindi discusses the *number* strings on instruments among various peoples he turns into a sort of cultural anthropologist, and connects the number of strings chosen by each people with their view of the world as well as other phenomena deemed significant. Here again we need to ask certain questions that help in bringing out some of the assumptions that it seems to us Kindi is making.

In some cases such as the Indians' belief that the cause of the world is one, the soul is one etc., it should have been obvious that some of those beliefs are shared by other peoples who have not chosen one string on their 'official' instruments. So it is not clear whether Kindi would want to say about this case that while many peoples believe that the cause of the world is one, that the one is a root number, that the soul is one, nevertheless it was the Indians who in

³³ See Carroll Pratt, *Music as the Language of Emotion*, p. 18

fact did so in a culturally significant way, *and* as a result created their leading instrument with one string. In other words, they executed a cultural-societal performative which established for them that special connection. So whereas the numerical similarity was a necessary but not sufficient condition in and of itself, the cultural performative, or some such cultural convention, supplied the other condition for making the paring off sufficiently grounded. This, in the way we saw earlier, where the assumed metaphysics padded the necessary condition of similarity to convert it into a sufficient one.

We said “sort of” cultural anthropologist because in some of the examples he gives the description does not work. Of the tensomes for Biblical David’s ten-string lyre, we are told that there are ten fingers, and the categories are ten. Could David have known about the ten categories? And don’t the ten fingers enter the stage irrelevantly like my uncle’s four belts? Perhaps the performative is being made here by Kindi himself about the case of David, and the activities of our ‘cultural anthropologist’ are temporarily suspended.

The only clue we have that explains the relation between the number of strings and the beliefs of various people is the following remark:

Aside from the differences in the number of strings, there are different doctrines and views about the significance of this number which is pleasing to them.³⁴

And if one were to wonder why of all the various cultural creations should musical things in particular, especially musical instruments, become such a theoretically significant link with the elements, the answer is right in Pythagorean territory. Human music and musical instruments—and not feathers nor haberdashery items—are intermediaries between the human world and the celestial world, a point that will be made more explicitly by the Ikhwan al-Safa. Here are Kindi’s words:

When they (the Ancient Philosophers) showed that there was nothing sensible which is not composed of the four elements and the fifth nature, I mean, fire, air, water, earth and the *falak*, they were driven by sagacity and guided by intelligence, and their intellect told them to devise sonorous string instruments that mediate between the self and the composition of the elements and the fifth nature (the celestial sphere). They also devised several string instruments that are in accordance with the composition of animal bodies from which (instruments) emerge sounds that are similar to the human composition.³⁵

³⁴ *Rasā’il* II, p. 72

³⁵ *Muṣawwītāt*, p. 71

Thus it would seem that the universe is stacked with theoretically significant correlations which it is the business of the philosopher to uncover. That is what the goal of theoretical knowledge requires.

One would expect efficient causality to be operative in some of the other links seen by Kindi, for, according to him, the *falak* is the proximate efficient cause of change in the sensible world. It affects the seasons, generation and corruption, the distribution and the combining of hot-cold, dry-moist.³⁶ These last are in turn related to the four elements: fire is hot and dry, air is warm and moist, water is cold and moist, and earth cold and dry.³⁷ Air and earth are opposites, as are water and fire, for these pairs have none of the preceding properties in common.

In so far as the celestial sphere affects the epochs and seasons which in turn affect the character and mores of peoples, this gives it an indirect causal role in things musical, for it is the differences among peoples that translate into the different musical skills and musical preferences already discussed.

With no extension of the efficient causal role of the *falak* directly to music, the links between the musical and the non-musical are described exclusively in such terms as *mushākalah* (similarity or likeness)³⁸ or *tanāsub* and *munāsabah* (correspondence, affinity).³⁹

The Other Connections

We have concentrated our discussion so far on the links between musical string instruments, on the one hand, and the elements and peoples' beliefs and temperaments on the other. We assume that the same sort of relation binds the strings of the *'ūd*, rhythms and melodies, on the one hand, and the many other non-musical things: the seasons of the year, quarters of the moon, time of day, humors of the body, and all the other things tabulated in our Appendix.

On this Kindi is less explicit and less generous in his explanation. We do get hints that recall the pairing off of the thin-to-thick strings with the light-to-heavy elements. For the humors of the body range from the relatively thin bile to the relatively thick phlegm, and the matching with the lute strings follows accordingly.⁴⁰ One then assumes that fire and summer are alike for the obvious reason, and

³⁶ *Rasā'il* I, pp. 219 ff.

³⁷ *Rasā'il* I, p. 258

³⁸ *Fī Ajzā'*, p. 100

³⁹ *Muṣawwitāt*, p. 71; *Fī Ajzā'* pp. 100 ff.

⁴⁰ *Muṣawwitāt*, p. 78

since fire goes with *al-zīr*, then so does summer. Youth and courage go together, and both suggest the 'daring' of fire which is already matched with the thin *al-zīr*.

Connections become less clear when *al-zīr* is said to go with the first quarter of the *falak*, the first part of the tropic of Cancer, one of the quarters of the moon, the southerly winds, the second quarter of the month, the afternoon part of the day, and the attractive powers in the body.

IV. *The Effects of Music*

There is one further connecting dimension which plays a great role in Kindi's philosophy of music, and that is the very old concept of the effect of music on the physiological, emotional and character traits of humans (and animals). This is important not only for the theoretical knowledge that Kindi seeks, but is indispensable for the practical goal of therapy that the philosopher-physician can administer.

Kindi speaks of an affinity between musical instruments and the constitutions of members of the animal kingdom. As evidence for this he cites the diverse effects that various instruments have on various animals. For example, dolphins and whales are delighted with the sounds of the flute (*al-zamr*) and the horn (*al-būq*), and rush towards the boat when they hear these, while fish congregate in one place upon hearing the plucking of a *pandore* (a lute). On the other hand, sheep, when they hear the shepherd's whistle (*al-ṣafīr*), gather willingly and without resistance. Peacocks respond to strings by opening their tails.⁴¹

This principle of various responses to various instruments applies to peoples too. The Persians are not moved by the organ (*al-urghūn*) nor by the gong (*al-nāqūs*). Nor are the Indians and Romans moved by the long-necked lute of Khurāsān (*al-tunbūr*).⁴² These differences among peoples are mentioned by many writers in Islam from al-Jāhīdh in the ninth century to Ibn Khaldun in the fourteenth, but not only in reactive terms. They are stated also in terms of the differentiating skills of different peoples.

For example, according to al-Jāhīdh, the Arabs excelled in the lin-

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71 f.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 72

guistic arts, especially poetry.⁴³ Ibn Khaldun maintains that this gave the Arabs a natural connection with music, for one would suppose that poetry already possesses its harmony, its own rhythm and “tune”.⁴⁴ Both writers maintain that the blacks have a natural talent for, and excel in rhythm and dance.⁴⁵ Al-Jāhīdh, himself a black, says that the Indians whom he includes among the blacks, are superior in vocal music and the beauty of the singing of their female vocalists.⁴⁶ Ibn Buṭlān (d. 1068), agreeing about the blacks’ affinity for and superiority in rhythm and dance, says that if a black were to fall from the sky he or she would fall in rhythm.⁴⁷

Al-Jāhīdh is judicious in qualifying the logic of such generalizations. For not every Greek is a philosopher, nor every Chinese a skilful artist, every Arab a distinguished poet. Rather such skills are more common and more perfect in the respective groups.⁴⁸

Yet the difference in the effects of music on people is noted by Kindi not only in terms of diverse groups and their characteristics, but also in terms of the character of the music itself. These are responses that cut across species and nationalities. Some music fills the listener, any listener, with courage and incites to war, other music delights the soul and endows it with strength, still other music fills one with sadness. The same passage also refers to effects on birds, bees, pheasants and what inhabits the sea, but without specifying the sort of effect on all of these.⁴⁹

Several things are interesting about Kindi’s discussion of the effects of music. First. Of the many connections that music is said to have, this, its effect, is the only one in which the musical part in the connection is not peripheral, but pertains directly to the character of music as a listened-to phenomenon. The other connections with the number and thickness of strings would be peripheral in our sense of the term, for they do not concern music as an auditory experience.

Second. The different affinities between musical instruments and types of music, on the one hand, and the kinds of species and groups of people, or kinds of bio-psychological constitutions, on the other, illustrate the principle stated by Kindi of the role that musical instru-

⁴³ Al Jāhīdh, *Majmū‘at Rasā’il*, Second Essay, *Risālah ila al-Faṭḥ*, p.44

⁴⁴ *Muqaddimah*, II, pp. 401 ff

⁴⁵ Al-Jāhīdh *Kitāb fakh al-sūdān ‘ala al-b ḥidān*, in *Rasā’il al-Jāhīdh*, p.68; Ibn Khaldun *Muqaddimah* I, p. 174.

⁴⁶ *Rasā’il al Jāhīdh*, p. 82

⁴⁷ *Shiloah Theory*, p.160

⁴⁸ *Majmū‘at Rasā’il*, Second Essay, p. 42 f.

⁴⁹ *Muṣawwītāt*, p. 72

ments are supposed to have, that of mediating, among other things, between the world of musical sound and the constitutions of humans and animals. And it is this connection that provides one basis for the theoretical knowledge in question. It is what provides the philosopher with a causal principle, a *‘illah*, which is the requisite of any rational explanation. There is yet one further point of interest.

Music and Medicine

Third. The phenomenon of different affinities and different effects opens up an important practical possibility besides the theoretical one just mentioned. The philosopher who knows all these extra-musical facts about music is in the same position as the physician who can use his knowledge to custom-tailor his treatment of patients in order to cure them and preserve their health.⁵⁰ As a matter of fact, and more broadly, the whole elaborate scheme of connections between music and a host of extra-musical things, from the astronomical to the basic elements, to the time of year, month and day, to the ages of man, as well as the physiological and psychological functions directly affected by the musical character—this entire scheme then becomes the basis for medical therapy. The practitioner will know what to administer, under what conditions, and at what appropriate time, in order to achieve both physical and psychological health.⁵¹

Al-Qiftī tells the following story of how Kindi himself treated the sick with music. A successful business man had been antagonistic to Kindi and attacked him persistently. One day the merchant's son who was also his accountant suffered an apoplexy. This of course made the merchant distraught, and it disrupted his business, for only his son knew what the earnings were and who owed him money. So he went to every doctor and brought each in turn to examine his son and propose treatment. But the physicians dared to do nothing in view of the gravity of the case and its dangers. Finally some of them said to the merchant: you are in the neighborhood of the philosopher of the age and the one most knowledgeable in treating this ailment. Seek him out and you will get what you desire. So the merchant sent one of his brothers to Kindi and imposed on him to visit the youth. The philosopher went to the merchant's residence, saw the son and immediately felt his pulse. Kindi then ordered that they summon some of his music pupils who were skilled with the lute, and who

⁵⁰ *Ibidem.*

⁵¹ *Ibidem.*

knew the melodic modes that sadden, gladden or strengthen the heart and soul. Four pupils appeared and were ordered by Kindi to play right close to the boy's head, without stopping. He even gave them some technical hints about their playing, for after all Kindi was himself a master of the instrument and composed a short exercise for his students.⁵²

Kindi kept his hand on the pulse, and as the playing proceeded he could feel the pulse strengthen. Gradually the boy began to regain consciousness. He even sat up and was able to speak. Kindi then told the father to ask his son to update him on the accounts of his business while the musicians played on. As the father was writing down all the information he wanted, the players became remiss and strayed from the melodic mode they were in. Upon this the boy fell back into the apopleptic state. The father asked that the musicians be ordered to resume what they were playing earlier. Kindi replied that the boy must have had a little left to his life which has now expired, and no human can stretch life when its term has ended. The boy had now used up in full the gift that God had given him.⁵³

It was but a few years later that Abū l-Faraj Ibn Hindū (d.1019) discusses what a physician should know to be perfect in his profession. Music is one of the many sciences required. In a striking analogy, the physician is said to need to rely on music as he does on the pharmacist and the blood-letting surgeon. However, Ibn Hindū hastens to add that this does not mean the physician himself has to play the instruments and execute the dance.⁵⁴

The Four Strings and Therapy

To give the musical-non-musical connections further detail and concreteness, we give the following examples relating to the four strings on the *ʿūd*: the C (*al-zīr*), the G (*al-mathnā*), the D (*al-mathlath*), and the A (*al-bamm*) strings. What details we select at this point will be highly selective, as we give a full list of the various connections in the Appendix. Of the humors of the body, the C string corresponds to (*mushākil*) to the bile, and of the organs, the heart. Of the mental powers, it corresponds to the rational; of the bodily powers, the attractive power that acts by a combination of heat and dryness. And of its

⁵² See *Mūsīqā al-Kindī*, by Zakariyyā Yūsuf, p. 27

⁵³ The story is reproduced in Zakariyyā Yūsuf, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 29 ff.

⁵⁴ Shiloah, *Dimensions of Music in Islamic and Jewish Culture*, Essay V, Ibn Hindū *Kitāb Miftāḥ al-ṭibb* (*The Key in Medicine*), Folio 28 b of the photo-printed manuscript, or Essay V, p. 460 of the French translation.

behavioral effects: courage, readiness to assist, haughtiness, sway, and aggressiveness.⁵⁵

The therapeutic indications of the C-string: to enhance the joyous assertive traits, to strengthen the gall and its important functions in the body. It works best in wintry type weather and at the time of sleep. It should also help to thin out and dissolve the phlegm.⁵⁶

On the other hand, the G-string is akin to the blood in the body, to the imagination among the intellectual functions, and, of its effects on the functions of the body, it enhances digestion, and acts by a combination of heat and humidity. It corresponds to the liver, and of its behavioral effects, it induces sweet temper, laughter, cheer, joy, mirth, amusement, justice, fairness, the love of righteousness, friendship and love. The therapeutic indications: it strengthens the joyous, generous, sympathetic traits, and strengthens the blood in all its features. It also breaks the obstructiveness of melancholy and eliminates its effects.⁵⁷

The D-string (*al-mathlath*), corresponds to the phlegm, to memory among the intellectual powers, and to the brain among bodily organs. Of the powers of the body it connects with the defensive mechanism which acts by a combination of cold and wet. Of its effects on character traits, it promotes virtuousness, politeness, fearfulness, gentleness and friendliness. For indications, it is to be used to induce fearfulness and calm, to regulate the phlegm and tranquilize the bile.

Finally, the A-string (*al-bamm*) corresponds to the testicles (*al-unthayān*) in the body, to the retaining intellectual power, to the expellant of the bodily powers which act by cold and dry. Its behavioral effects are patience, gravity, friendliness and deliberateness. The indications: to be used to induce joy, an affectionate and glowing state, to strengthen black bile and to cool the blood.

There is an extra sophistication in this therapeutic approach. For mixing strings can correspondingly mix the effects. Medicine is thus further revealed as an art and a science. It is the art of uniquely customizing all the relevant knowledge (the science) for the particular case at hand.

⁵⁵ *Muṣawwītāt*, pp. 85 f.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 86 f.. See the Appendix for a fuller and more complete chart of the various correspondences.

Adding Colors and Scents

There is one further and most interesting direction that Kindi takes in his discussion of music, as he continues his expansive view, now going beyond the metaphysical, astrological, physiological and psychological connections already noted. In Kindi's essay *Fī ajzā' khabariyyah fī l-mūsīqī* there is a section on the mixing of colors, followed by a section on mixing scents.

Having discussed the effects on listeners of what comes to them through the sense of hearing, Kindi turns now to the psychological effects of colors, but of colors in combination. For example, he says that the juxtaposing of red and yellow activates the capacity to overcome, of yellow and black the submissive trait. A black, red, yellow and white combination stirs the generous spirit, and so on, for two pages of such examples.⁵⁸

Whereas with colors Kindi discusses only colors in combination, in the case of scents he does both; he gives the effects of individual scents as well as of combinations. Jasmine, for example, stirs the overcoming capacity, while the narcissus stirs the effeminate, flirting and pleasure-seeking capacities. However, the two in combination activate both the overcoming and the pleasure-seeking capacities. And if one combines lilies with roses, then the powers of loving and nobleness are stirred.⁵⁹

One does not know how all these results were arrived at, whether from personal experience, informal experimentation or whatever. Modern perception psychologists might disagree with Kindi on the specifics and question his method of inquiry, but, one would think, they might react sympathetically to that *sort* of inquiry. However, what is interesting and what matters for us about Kindi's excursion into colors and scents is not whether some particular claim about the effects of these is correct or not. Rather, it is the fact that the subject is discussed at all, and especially that it is discussed in connection with music.

That it is discussed at all gives one a sense of a Kindi searching for a philosophy of the sensuous experience that encompasses all the senses. Or, almost all, for the senses of taste and touch are given a very cursory treatment. What he says about taste is the following:

⁵⁸ *Fī ajzā'*, pp. 104 f.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 105 f.

We have now discussed what reaches the soul from the three senses: hearing, sight and smell, let us now come to what the sense of taste shares in the conceptual vocabulary which is a nobler resource for the soul than what we have previously presented. For those were ephemeral sensible organs, whereas reason that delivers these conceptual terms is the noblest of creatures.⁶⁰

And on the sense of touch we read:

And since the fifth sense which is touch, is like the other four in most respects, we have dispensed with singling out that by which it delivers pleasure and delight to the soul.⁶¹

Kindi then proceeds to present anecdotes of what philosophers said at a banquet. Much of what is said is about the comparative merits of sight and hearing. Perhaps it is left to the reader to figure out what the sense of taste and touch share with these, for that is not made explicit by Kindi.

At any rate, the fact that colors and scents are discussed in an essay on music, and the other two senses at least mentioned, is an extension of the principle already employed with the other connections that music is said to have. Kindi obviously believes that there are a number of phenomena in the world that are significantly related to music.

Yet there is an important difference in the relation between music and colors-scents, on the one hand, and music and all the extra-musical phenomena discussed earlier, on the other. For colors and scents are not introduced into the discussion because of any relation they have with music such that it gives them a primary place in the philosopher's search for theoretical knowledge. Colors and scents do not seem to have special causal or affinity connections with music, as exists in the case of the other non-musical phenomena.

Given what Kindi has claimed about the effects of music proper on the listener, and noting, separately, that colors and scents can cause some similar effects, he can then suggest using the latter to enhance the effects of the former. They seem to add a bonus enrichment. As a matter of fact, the theoretical knowledge in all its directions can now be supplemented by what Kindi claims about colors and scents in order to magnify the effects of music in the pursuit of both therapy and enjoyment.

And thus the double task of philosophy, the theoretical and the practical, as it pertains to music can finally come to rest.

⁶⁰ *Fī Ajzā*², pp. 106-107

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 107

CHAPTER TWO

IKHWAN AL-ŞAFA

As we noted in our last chapter, Greek ideas on music, especially the Pythagorean, first took hold in Islam in the thought of Kindi. For Kindi, music is relevantly connected to many other things in the total scheme of the Cosmos, and must be understood not only in terms of its own proper elements—intervals, ratios, melodies, rhythms—but also, and especially for the philosopher, in terms of the affinities and similarities that music has to the metaphysical, astronomical, astrological, meteorological and other aspects of the Cosmos. Music also has affinities with , and causally affects our biological constitution and our psychological traits. The assumption of all this is that the Cosmos has a unity based on the principle of affinity, or theoretically significant similarity among its constituents. For the philosopher who seeks theoretical knowledge about music, the important questions are the questions about these extra-musical affinities.

This way of approaching music is precisely the one taken by the Ikhwan al-Şafa. The first and most important challenge to this Kindi-Ikhwan approach comes from Farabi (d. 950) and Ibn Sina (d. 1073), as we shall see in our next two chapters.

The Ikhwan al-Şafa (The Brethren of Purity) are a group of thinkers who lived in Baṣrah during the second half of the 10th Century. They were followers of a branch of the Shi'ah sect known as Isma'īlism, and formed a secret society for both their intellectual and political activities. They are known primarily for their fifty two essays on the philosophic knowledge of their time, essays which acquired an encyclopedic status. The Ikhwan accord the sciences of mathematics and astrology a primary place among the sciences.¹

Like Kindi the Ikhwan give a full multi-dimensional account of all the things in the universe to which the various 'ūd strings correspond, the lute being generally acknowledged to be the most important instrument of the Arabs.

There are a few differences of detail in the many connections. For instance, the Ikhwan include colors and scents along with the other things that are bound together by the principle of similarity. Whereas

¹ Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 186

Kindi, as we saw, introduces the subject of colors and scents when he explores the extra dimension of listener effect. Effect and affinity are often linked in such discussions, but Kindi does not explicitly bring in colors and scents by virtue of the similarities they have with the other items.

Moreover, the Ikhwan include the sense of taste and correlations with specific flavors, in their list of what coheres together, whereas Kindi is rather elusive on this matter, as we have seen.

However, in the discussion of the effects of music on the physical and mental states of listeners, Kindi is more alert to, and gives a fuller discussion of the medical therapeutic uses of music. We have seen how Kindi himself took a hand in the cure of a sick young man. The Ikhwan must have had their mind set primarily on the ultimate spiritual uses of music.

Furthermore, the Ikhwan have an elaborate schematic discussion of sound in general, including musical sound. We do not find this in Kindi, but it does show up later in Ibn Sina. Ibn Sina's discussion of sound, besides being briefer, is that of a functional biologist, whereas the Ikhwan speak more like physicists.

Perhaps a more important point of difference is that the Ikhwan work with the principle of ratios and numbers more explicitly than does Kindi. Not only do they claim that "the body of the world" is based on proportions,² but they also explicitly give the arithmetical ratios that permeate the heavenly bodies and much of the rest of things including music.³

Finally, and most importantly, is that for the Ikhwan, all the sciences, including mathematics and music are in the end to serve an ultimate religious goal: to glorify God and help humans draw nearer to Him.

I. Sound and Musical Sound

The Ikhwan first approach sound as physicists, discussing its nature, its causal conditions and its subdivisions. There is also a brief explanation of the process of perceiving sound. When they come to musical sounds and the combinations that make up musical composition, they shift to the biological and psychological effects of music on the listener. And having established this aspect of effect, they move to the

² *Rasāʾil*, p. 216

³ *Ibid.*, p. 214

final goal of the musical experience which is spiritual and mystical. The attainment of this highest goal is made possible by the assumption of the affinity that exists between music and the make-up of the higher spheres of being. This, in a nutshell, is the philosophy of music of the Ikhwan.

Nature and Characteristics of Sound

Let us begin with sound (*al-ṣawṭ*). Sound is a knock or shock (*qarʿ*) produced in the air whenever objects collide against one another. This air impacted by the collision undulates in all directions in circular form, as when we agitate water in a container by blowing on it. The wider the circle the feebler the sound, until the vanishing point. How far the sound travels depends on the power of the sound, and this on the amount of air expelled by the contact which in turn depends on the size of the bodies and the force of their impact on one another. Thunder makes the most powerful sound, and thus its sound travels the farthest.⁴

There are other basic features of sound besides its power. Each sound has its own unique quality (*naghmah waṣfiyyah*), its own peculiar quality that distinguishes it from any other.⁵ And we can count on the air to faithfully transmit the distinctness of each sound. The Ikhwan proceed to discuss the various factors that correlate with the distinctive quality of particular sounds. The following factors are worth the mention: the size of the body, the smoothness or roughness of its surface, whether it is solid and full or concave and cavernous, the quantity of air it can hold if cavernous, as in the case of animals with deep lungs, long throat and broad jaws. And there is of course the intensity with which air is taken in and let out.

In the case of animals deprived of lungs, such as wasps, locusts and crickets, these make their sound by flapping their wings. In their case, but also more generally, fineness or thickness, length as well as rapidity of movement determine the quality of the sounds emitted.⁶

Applying these general principles to objects that happen to be musical instruments, the modality or unique quality of sound here depends on the form of the instrument, the material from which it is made and its dimensions: whether it is large or small, long or short, and, where applicable, the volume of the cavity, the narrowness of the

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 188 ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 189

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 192

opening, the fineness or thickness of the strings. And of course, for all instruments, the way they are played or plucked is itself a factor.⁷

Kinds of Sound and Their Causes

The Ikhwan then offer divisions of sound into its various kinds.⁸ The first major division is between the sounds of *animate* and of *inanimate* beings. The inanimate subdivide into *natural* and *artificial*. Natural sounds are such as those made by stones, wood, thunder and wind. Artificial sounds are those made by trumpets, flutes, drums and other musical instruments. However, in the case of animate beings and instruments, the Ikhwan must be speaking of the sounds these make qua animate (the chirping of a squirrel) and qua musical instruments (the tones of the flute). For animate beings this is sound as *voice*, to borrow from Aristotle⁹. And it would seem as if some such notion should be extended to the sound of the flute. For there is a difference between the musical tone of the flute when it is played as a musical instrument and the clanking sound the flute makes as a physical object when it drops on the ground; and the squirrel makes a thud when it drops on the ground qua physical object. This of course is the obvious ambiguity of “to make a sound”.

The case of animate beings subdivides into the sounds pertaining to *rational* and *non-rational* beings, that is the sounds of humans and animals, respectively. Then the rational subdivides further into the *articulated*, what makes use of language (formed letters, words, speech) and the *non-articulated* such as laughter and weeping, or as the Ikhwan put it, any human sound that “has no spelling”.¹⁰ Yet this must still be expressive, if not articulated, to distinguish it from stomach gurgles and knuckle crackings.

Musical Sound

This scheme as it stands does not readily accommodate musical sound, for the scheme is organized in terms of what or who makes the sound and not in terms of the nature of the sound itself. And in one type of case, the determinant is whether language is used or not. Musical sound can be made by animate beings who are articulate, that is, when music is vocal and uses words. This is *ghina'* in the narrow

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 188 f.

⁹ *De Anima*, II, 8, 420, 4-6

¹⁰ *Rasā'il*, Vol. I, p. 189

sense of singing—the term is sometimes used generically for music. But musical sound can also be made by artificial inanimate objects, namely, musical instruments. Moreover, natural inanimate (inorganic) bodies such as the heavenly sphere are also said to make musical sound, as we shall see shortly. It would seem then that the category of musical sound cuts across the division of the schema just presented which did not tell us what was musical about the sound.

A clue as to what musical sound is comes in a passage before the one of the sound schema, and is stated independently of it.

Music (*ghināʾ*¹¹) is well-ordered (or harmonious, *muʿallafah*) melodies; melody (*al-laḥn*) is successive (*mutawātirah*) tones (*naghamāt*); tones are measured sounds, and sound is a shock produced in the air from the collision of bodies against each other.¹¹

Musical sound is not just sound; it is measured sound. It is sound the understanding and the production of which is a function of precise arithmetical ratios and proportions. Thus we are told that music (*al-mūsīqā*) is “the art of composition (*al-taʿlīf*) in the knowledge of the proportions.”¹² The word “proportion” is used in the literature in both the arithmetical and the non-arithmetical sense. For the Ikhwan the arithmetical sense is clearly the one in mind. Their section on the *ʿūd* (lute) contains a good illustration of the arithmetical basis of the musical sounds of that instrument.¹³ And the *ʿūd*, as it is often said, occupies a place in Arabic music theory which corresponds to the place of the piano in Western music theory.

Of course music is more than musical sounds or tones. It is a well-ordered arrangement of these. We shall now say more about the features of sound that are pertinent to music, both as musical sound and as musical composition.

Sounds as to their quality (*min jihat al-kayfiyyah*) are divided into eight kinds, four pairs of opposites: 1) the great and the little; for example, the sound of the procession drum as compared with the slim drums used by the *mukhannathūn*, the effeminate singers; 2) the fast and the slow; 3) the high and the low (in pitch); and 4) the sonorous (*al-jahīr*) and the light (*al-khafīf*).¹⁴

As to quantity, sounds are continuous or discontinuous; and here the principles of movement and rest are relevant. Some instruments like the clarinets and flutes can produce continuous sound. On the

¹¹ Ras āʾil, Vol. I, p.188. See also *Ibid.*, p. 192

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 183

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.202 ff.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 193

other hand, strings that are plucked, and percussive sticks that are beaten together, produce discontinuous sound.¹⁵

Sounds in combination are either concordant or discordant. Not only is this more relevant to music as an art of composition, of well-ordered melodies and rhythms, but it also provides the bridge for the transition from the auxiliary domain of physics and arithmetic to the domain of the physiological, psychological, moral and spiritual effects of music on the listener.

II. *Effects and Origin of Music*

The Power of Music

Concordant well-proportioned sound equilibrates the mixture of the humors, gives pleasure and well-being to the soul, while the discordant are disagreeable and repelling. Deafening and incoherent sounds disrupt the equilibrium and can cause death. This is why, we are told, the Greeks used an "artificial instrument" (identified in the literature as the *urghūn*¹⁶) in war to terrify their enemies, a kind of point not lost on Shams al-Dīn al-Shāfi'ī (16th C. jurist) who maintains that instruments such as the drum (*ṭabl*) should be allowed even in the mosque because "it is an instrument used in battle to frighten the enemy, unbelievers and Satan".¹⁷

Another dramatic testimony to the special power of music comes in a series of anecdotes. Here is one of them. Two men were at a drinking establishment. They were mad at one another, and had long standing grudges and hatreds for one another. As drinking proceeded along its plentiful path, the fires of their antagonisms raged to full fury, and each made moves to kill the other. When the music performer sensed the situation he changed to a calming, soothing melody. He persisted until the fury of the combatants subsided, and they proceeded to hug one another in reconciliation.¹⁸

Another testimonial to the power of music to change souls from state to state and change character from opposite to opposite, is the tale of an eminent man who invited a number of the most notable performers. They were each assigned a seat in accordance with the host's judgement of their performance skills. Then in came a man dressed in

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 194

¹⁶ Al-Shirwānī, *Majallah fī l-mūsīqī*, p. 23

¹⁷ Shiloah, *The Theory*, p. 326

¹⁸ *Rasā'il* I, p. 184 f.

ragged and looking as haggard as can be. The host elevated him to a choice seat ahead of all the others. There was general consternation and disgruntlement. The host then asked the intruder to show the assembled gathering his skills. So the man pulled out a few pieces of wood which he put together, and attached to them the strings he brought along. And he played. The first piece he played filled everyone with laughter, pleasure and good humor. Then with a different tune he made everyone cry from the tenderness of the music. Then he changed again, and this time put everyone to sleep. He then left the room and was never heard of again.¹⁹

Variety and Origin of Music

Implicit in all this is not only the power of music but also the variety of its effects. As with Kindi, the variety is individuated in terms of mood and emotional response, as well as in terms of the diversity of peoples and different social occasions. To each humor, to each nature corresponds a rhythm and a melody.²⁰ Proof of this is given in the different preferences for different rhythms and melodies by different peoples. Each people possesses its own melodies and rhythms which give them pleasure, just as they have their own language, character and customs. Even within one people there are differences, as in the case of individuals who are pleased by different melodies and rhythms at different times.

The variety of effects is also individuated in terms of different occasions. For, because music is recognized to have different effects, one kind of music is more appropriate for a particular occasion than another. As a result, we have music for processions, weddings, war, funerals, religious festivals as well as for entertainment.

All these differences, whether stated in terms of the variety of social occasions or variety of peoples, are said to be a function of the varied mixtures of the humors of the body, as well as the cultural differences in time and place. Hovering over this entire sub-lunar scene is the one proximate causal overlord, the celestial sphere about which we shall speak shortly.

According to the Ikhwan all the arts were initiated by the *hukamāʾ*,²¹ (the Greek Philosophers), and they established all the rules for these

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 185

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 196

²¹ According to one tradition Pythagoras first heard the music of the sphere, and then laid down the rules for human music; *Ibid.*, p. 208. See also Al-Shirwānī *Op. Cit.*, p. 23. In the Ikhwan *Rasāʾil*, p. 211, prophets are said to be the ones to set the *religious* goals.

arts. The rest of the people learned these from them. And what the wise ones wanted to accomplish most of all was to find the means for warding off the devastations of natural evil and improve the chances for the good things in life to take hold. For this of course there is nothing better than the sacred law enjoining fasting and prayer to God so that He may spare them the evil and and grant them the good. But what was needed still was something for softening the hearts of humans and making them more contrite and compliant for the religious life. So they introduced music into the ceremonies of devotion and sacred readings. Cited as examples: David's lamentations, readings by Christians in their churches and Muslims in their mosques, in which there is the attempt to add beautiful cadences and pleasant voice modulation to their solemn reading. The religious effectiveness of this, the Ikhwan say, was one primary reason for originating music.²²

Other reasons are as multiple as there are uses for music. Thus the melody for giving courage was devised for wars. There were melodies used in hospitals (*al-maristānāt*) for curing the sick, melodies for sad occasions and ones for happy occasions, melodies for camel trips, for tending cattle, even ones for milking them, and ones for hunting deer. In brief, there were melodies for all the varieties of effects on the souls of humans and the bodies of humans and animals.²³

Foursomes and Therapy

Like Kindi, and in what looks more like retroactive symbolic connecting than a historical account, the Ikhwan maintain that the musician philosophers specified the number of strings on the lute to four, no more and no less, so that their creations should emulate the natural order of things that are below the lunar sphere, and this in further emulation of the wisdom of the Creator. The *zīr* string is like fire, its tone matching fire's warmth and intensity. The *mathnā* is like air, its tone akin to the its moist gentleness. The *mathlath*, with its cool and moist tone, is like water. Finally, *al-bamm*, the thickest of the four strings, is like earth, for the quality of its tone.²⁴

In a section about all the significant things that are four or are divided into four, we are told that this quadruplic feature of what composes the world of generation and corruption was precisely God's intention. In His supreme wisdom he did what can only embody per-

²² *Rasā'il* I, pp. 186-187

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-188

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 213

perfect artisanship and masterful sagacity.²⁵ The examples that follow cover four pages, and one feels one is in familiar Kindian territory. One slice of the four chains of interconnected tetrads should be sufficient here. Among other things it would show the way in which the Ikhwan incorporate the senses of smell, taste and sight.

The *mathnā* string keeps the following company. Of the seasons, spring; sections of the Zodiac: the beginning of Aries and the end of Gemini; the celestial spheres: the eastern quarter rising to the pole of the sky; the first quarter of the month; the characteristic aspects²⁶ the left tetrad; the elements: air; the natures: hot and moist; south, of the cardinal points; the winds: the south wind; of the quarters of the day: the first six hours; the humors: the blood; of the four ages: the days of youth; bodily powers: the digestive; the animal powers: the imaginative faculty; of behavior states: happiness and joy; of the moral qualities: generosity and fairness; of melodies: humming; discourse and poetry: the panegyric; flavors: sweets; of colors: the temperate hues such as the clove; of scents: those of violets and marjoram.²⁷

Yet the Ikhwan do not want to say that seeing the world in fours is the only way one should, nor the only way all people do in fact see it. Like Kindi they acknowledge, albeit in a somewhat cursory fashion, that different peoples do make different numbers central. The dualists have their duality, the Christians their trinity, the naturalists their tetrads, the Ḥāzmiyyah their quantuples, the Indians their hexagonals (not the *one* mentioned by Kindi for the Indians), and the Kayyāliyyah have their nines.²⁸

However the tetrads already discussed above, and at greater length in the Ikhwan essay, are not presented there as a peculiarity of the Arabs whose special instrument is the four stringed *ʿūd*, in the manner of Kindi.

We have already noted that the Ikhwan were much less pre-occupied with therapy than was Kindi, but we do have the following move in that direction which comes in a section where they match the strings of the *ʿūd* with the elements and the humors of the body. And after noting the effects of each string on its corresponding humor, they say:

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 229

²⁶ I borrow this translation of "*ittiṣālāt al-kawākib*" from Shiloah's translation of the essay by the Ikhwan.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 229-230.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.217

If the notes (of these strings) were composed into the melodies that correspond to them, and the melodies were used at the times of day and night which are opposed to the dominant illnesses and maladies, then they would quiet them, break their severity, and lighten the pain for the ill.. For things that are similar in nature, when they multiply and come together, their action is strengthened, their effects are made apparent, and they overcome what is opposed to them.²⁹

Two things are at work here. First is the strengthening of the healing potential of the music. This is achieved by matching the melodies to the musical character of the strings. The second is the appropriate use of those melodies. Here the principle of therapy may be analogically called the throwing of water on fire. Werner and Sonne call this the *allopathic* type of *Katharsis*,³⁰ curing by opposite natures. In his translation of the Ikhwan essay, Shiloah gives the following explanation

It follows that if one plays music during the part of the day that corresponds to the humour in opposition to the excessive humor, one obtains the desired result.³¹

III. *The Spheres and Their Music*

The Ikhwan refer to the Greek philosophers' belief that the celestial bodies are the first causes of the secondary creations in the world of generation and corruption, and the movements in the first are the causes of changes in the second. Furthermore, those philosophers believe that the secondary creations, in their mode of being, imitate the celestial bodies which are their causes. These two points of doctrine are obviously shared by the Ikhwan.

What we have here are two connecting principles, two sorts of *'illahs*, working at the same time. One of these is the efficient causal role of the *falak* already stated by Kindi. The other is the relation of similarity or affinity between the two worlds. And it is the latter that is going to play the important and direct role in the Ikhwan's philosophy of music that follows.

Kindi had assumed that the celestial spheres produce their own music. The Ikhwan's prose has more of the flavor of arguments.

The first such argument is directed at those who would claim that

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 213

³⁰ *Op. Cit.*, p.274

³¹ *The Epistle on Music of the Ikhwān al-Şafa*, p. 43, n. 36. The reader is there referred to Léon Gauthier, *Antécédants gréco-arabes de la psychologique*, p.13f.

because the *falak* is a fifth nature it is not possible for it to have sounds, musical or otherwise.³² This may have been directed at Farabi who died in 950 A.D. At any rate, their argument is made to hinge on the question of how much is this celestial sphere like other bodies. The Ikhwan argue that some inhabitants of the *falak*, the stars, for example, emit light as fire does, while the moon reflects light like a mirror. The moon and the planet Mercury accept light and shade just as the air does. Proof of this is that the moon casts its shadow over Mercury. Now all these are characteristic of natural bodies, but are also shared by the celestial. Thus even though the *falak* is a fifth nature and thus different from the four that make up the bodies in the sublunar world, it is not different in all respects from these natural bodies. Continuing this line of argument, the Ikhwan say that while this fifth nature is neither hot nor cold nor wet, yet it is dry and solid, even more solid than sapphire. The various parts of the celestial sphere are contiguous, they touch and knock together and peal as do iron and brass. And since the celestial sphere is governed by ratios and proportion, the melodies they produce are measured and concordant.³³ We shall see clearly in the next section that these melodies are claimed to be more perfect and more harmonious than any earthly music.

The three points that support the argument are that the heavenly bodies: are solid, they knock together, and since they are properly ratio-ed their melodies are perfect.

Their solidity is probably not an issue. That they should be thought to knock together, is a requisite of the Ikhwan's physics of sound. But that they in fact do, and that without the knocking no sound could be produced, might be questioned. Perhaps we should leave this matter for Farabi, and our next chapter.

As to the perfection of the sound, this relies for its plausibility on two points. One comes from our experience with the *ʿūd* strings and the decisive role that ratios play in the quality of the sound as music, as against mere noise. The other comes from the religious-type tendency to give all that is above the world of generation and corruption—above the astronomical waist, so to speak—a status of perfection.

There is a second argument, which might be called an *ex post facto* teleological argument. It runs as follows.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 206

³³ *Ibidem.*

If the individuals of the celestial sphere did not have sounds and melodies there would have been no point for the inhabitants to have the power of hearing given to them. And if they had no hearing, then they would have been deaf dumb and blind.³⁴

The inhabitants in question are clearly beings such as angels. The answer to this argument could easily be something as follows. Because the angels get so saturated with the din of human and earthly noise, God in His infinite wisdom created for them a quiet noiseless retreat in the heavenly spheres. This of course is not by way of suggesting that this might have been so, but merely to underscore the lack of tightness in this argument.

The third argument presupposes the Pythagorean cosmology. There is even an explicit mention of Pythagoras and of his having heard the music of the spheres and then proceeded to extract from that music rules for human music. However, the argument in question does not rely on Pythagoras' personal experience for its premise. Rather, it presumes that the sub-lunar world was made to imitate the world of the spheres, and movements in the latter are the causes of movement and change in the former. Given that assumption, since we know we have music, therefore the spheres must have music too.

There is an eschatological rider to this argument that is supposed to bolster it. This is that we are of the heavenly sphere and to it we shall return.³⁵ The heavenly sphere is like a model we like to emulate, the way a child looks up to its parents.³⁶ The existing affinity between the two worlds facilitates this goal of ours. As we shall see in the next section, music functions like a ladder that links the human with the heavenly world.

The argument moves from the fact that we have our music to the fact of celestial music. This is mediated by the claim that our world is in certain respects like the heavenly world and derives its character from that heavenly world. The force of the argument is circumscribed entirely within the confines of Pythagorean cosmology. For those like Farabi and Ibn Sina who reject that cosmology this argument should carry no weight.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 206

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 206

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 208

IV. *The Ultimate Spiritual Goal*

The Matter and Form of Music

There is a basic principle in the thought of the Ikhwan which is at the root of how music functions in human life. This applies whether the music produces simple delight as at entertainment occasions, or leads to the highest spiritual goal. It is the mechanism by which music embodies and transmits meaning to the listener.

Music is at once a spiritual and a corporeal art, according to the Ikhwan. It is corporeal insofar as it is an art practiced with the hands. Thus its matter is composed of natural bodies, and all its products are physical forms.³⁷ But music also has for its matter that which is entirely spiritual, and that is the soul of the listener. Its effects on the soul of the listener, at least the immediate effects, are all spiritual manifestations.³⁸ And in its effects on the listener, music has the same relation to their souls as the artisan has on his medium, or the substratum of his art or craft. Music as a repository of meaning, gives its meaning as form, to the soul as its matter. This is the mechanism by which music bestows upon the soul the meaning embedded in it. The different character of each piece of music, or of each passage, gives its character to the soul of the listener. Thus some music imparts courage, other music energy in the performance of arduous tasks,³⁹ and so on, with the entire gamut of effects.

It is interesting that the aspect of effect is stated here in terms of the relation of form to matter: that the meaning resides in the music as the form of its matter, and that in contact with a listener, the soul of the listener serves as matter to the expressive form of the music.

Historically, this way of stating the double relation, first within music, and then between music and listener, is not to be found among the other Islamic philosophers we have studied. Furthermore, it is interesting in another way. It would be relevant to the contemporary discussions in Western aesthetics about the relation between music and the emotions, and of the status of the expressive character of music in relation to the composer, the work and the listener. But this would be a topic for a separate exploration.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 183

³⁸ *Ibidem.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 183 f.

This claim about music as a union of the spiritual and the corporeal does not by itself entail the view that the ultimate goal of the musical experience is spiritual-mystical. We need to refer to another belief which the Ikhwan state independently of this one.

The belief in question is central to the entire religious, but especially the mystical tradition, namely, that the destiny of humans lies in the higher world of spiritual reality. One variant of this point is stated by the Ikhwan in eschatological terms.

The essence of your soul is of the heavenly sphere, and unto the Heavens is its return after death, just as your body is of the earth, and unto the earth it will return after death.⁴⁰

Stated in terms of the purpose of the prophetic missions:

Their ultimate purpose is the salvation of the souls from the ordeals of earthly life and the misery of its people, and delivering them to the happiness of the after life and the bliss of its inhabitants.⁴¹

Yet this claim about the highest destiny does not by itself require that music shall have to serve that purpose. Clearly it is possible to accept that religious perspective without necessarily expecting music in particular to serve that purpose.

What leads the Ikhwan to join the two claims together—the claim that music is a spiritual and corporeal art and the claim about the destiny in the higher world—is a more specific belief which pervades their entire epistles and their discussion of all the sciences and the arts, including music, but especially music. It is not simply that humans have a higher spiritual destiny, but that all the sciences and the arts have as their final goal to help humans attain that destiny. Music may entertain and serve at different social functions, but in the end it has a higher calling: to help human kind to ascend to the world of the spirit.

In the final section of their essay on music, the Ikhwan clearly acknowledge the different yield listeners derive from music, depending on where they stand on the ladder of spiritual or mystical attainment, or failure to attain. This is a theme that runs throughout Islamic, especially mystical, thought: that the religious preparedness of the listener varies, and the music to which they should be permitted to be exposed depends on that degree of preparedness. Often it is suggested that for the novice music should be listened to only in the presence of an instructor. We find this in al-Sarrāj (d. 988), al-Makkī (d. 996), al-Qu-

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 226

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 211

shayrī (d. 1074), in Ghazali (d. 1111), and his brother Majd al-Dīn (d. 1126), and in Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240). This is a topic that will come up again in Part Two of this book.

We still have one gap to fill before we can clinch this attempt to charge music with its highest calling. That music is at once a spiritual and corporeal art gave us one mechanism for the transference of meaning to the human soul. That told us one thing about music: that it could bring about such an impactful transference. That all sciences and arts should serve the higher spiritual goal of reaching for the heavenly world from whence we came, this tells us, that, in the case of music, it should do so also. But there is still ahead of us a bit of Pythagorean cosmology that will tell us why music in particular is a good intermediary between the two worlds.

We will now identify three ways in which the Ikhwan describe how the mediating status of music facilitates the move upwards towards the true destiny for human beings. They are variations on the theme of the affinity that exists between the lower and higher worlds. They are discussed here in the order of their increasing specificity.⁴²

1. We have seen that the Ikhwan consider music as both corporeal and spiritual. But there is a more precise and, for our present purpose, a more pertinent form of this combination. The Ikhwan speak of music as meaning in the sound, having the same unitive relation that exists between the soul and the body. Now it is assumed throughout that our music imitates celestial music. Thus the meaning in our terrestrial music delivers the likes of its celestial kin. This mediated taste of the celestial music ignites in the human soul the desire to ascend to the higher sphere. It becomes the gateway to the world of the spirit. And it is the Neo-Platonism of the Ikhwan that turns a connection with an otherwise merely astronomical phenomenon, the heavenly sphere, into a contact with the spiritual world.

2. The rules for music are said to have been laid down by the ancient Sages, because they wanted to enhance the moral-religious values of humility and purity of heart. This of course is part of the recognition of the power of music to affect the soul in different ways. To ensure the proper achievement of these moral-religious qualities, these Sages—and there is specific reference to Pythagoras as the inventor of human music⁴³—who heard the celestial music, derived the rules for human music from that celestial audition. These rules of

⁴² For all of the following three points see *Ibid.*, pp. 206-210

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 208

music kinship between the two worlds draw—as one might say of a chimney with an open flue—the soul away from this world of less perfect music to where the music is maximally perfect and yields the highest pleasure; there where our destiny lies.

Having said these exalted things about music it is no wonder that the Ikhwan ask why it is that music received disapprobation in Islam. The answer is given in these words:

As to the forbidding of music in some of the laws of the prophets, peace be upon them, the reason is that it was used by people for other than the way the Sages had done; (they used it) for diversion and play, for enticing desire for worldly pleasures, and were in deception about the security it offers.⁴⁴

In the very extensive discussions of this matter among the jurists and philosophers of Islam, this is a very common explanation. The point will recur in our discussions in Part Two.

The Ikhwan show a very tolerant attitude towards other religions and other thought systems, and indeed their eclectic thought system has housed a number of diverse doctrines.⁴⁵ Their familiarity with the Christian teaching and their sympathetic reference to it is worthy of note. Thus in stating their view of the higher destiny for humans that music helps to achieve, they borrow Jesus' idea of being born again. So, for them, life and all its trappings are like the nine months in the womb. Birth is like the fulfillment of the higher religious *telos*, and whoever is not born again will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.⁴⁶ It is in terms of this final goal that music has its ultimate calling.

With all this said about music, and in the spirit of their overriding religiousness perhaps we should conclude with one of their nuggets: "The most pleasant melody is the conversation with the Creator."⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 210

⁴⁵ See Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 203

⁴⁶ *Rasā'il*, p. 226

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 241

CHAPTER THREE

FARABI

I. Preliminary

In the Arabic literature on music, Farabi justly deserves the special place accorded to him. Any reader of his work on the subject, especially of his *Kitāb al-mūsīqī al-kabīr*, cannot help but be uncommonly impressed by its scope, its systematic character, as well as its mastery of the fine points. Al-Ḥifnī, in his introduction to the *Kutāb*, calls it the greatest work on music ever written in the Arabic language.¹ A full and thorough picture of his contributions to music theory has yet to be drawn. It may well turn out that Farabi's greatest contributions, besides the encyclopedic and systematic character of his approach, is at the level of the important detail.

Farabi's own preface to his *magnum opus* begins as follows:

Every theoretical inquiry (*ṣinā'ah naḍḥariyyah*) is comprised of first principles and what follows from these.²

With this stand on solid Aristotelian methodological grounds, Farabi, like Aristoxenus before him, bids the celestial spheres farewell. For the focus now is on the principles and elements that pertain to the particular inquiry at hand. The first principles of the theoretical inquiry into music concern musical phenomena, and not what astronomy, or arithmetic or some other science has to offer. We shall see in our next chapter the much more explicit pronouncement of Ibn Sina on this very matter.

The first part of Farabi's *Kitāb* is about the nature of music—regarded essentially as melody—the origin of music, both vocal and instrumental, the kinds of melody, the practical and theoretical sides of the inquiry. All this is said to be an introduction to the art-science of music. But it is clear that the material derives its introductory status from the very methodology briefly referred to above. One must first talk about the principles and elements of music itself and then proceed to

¹ Preface to *Kitāb al-mūsīqī al-kabīr*, p.8.

² *Op. Cit.* p. 43. This is repeated by Mawlānā Mubarak Shāh in his *Commentary* on Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Urmawī's *Risālat al-Adwār*, in Baron d'Erlanger's translation, Vol. III, *La Musique Arabe*, p.192.

what follows from them. This is certainly Aristotelian.

II. *Music, the Art-Science*

Farabi says that the term "*musiqī*" (music) means "*al-alhān*" (melodies).³ By this, of course, Farabi does not mean to exclude the other elements such as tone, interval, rhythm, and so on. For these are already implicit in his definition and analysis of melody which is simply the arrangement of these other elements in set patterns. This is made clear in the heart of the book where the subject of music as a theoretical inquiry is given one last word. There we are told that

melody is a grouping of many (though) finite number of tones, all, or almost all, in accord the one with the other, in a specific arrangement, having a specific known combination of a particular melodic mode; its intervals precisely set within specific pitches and the transition is determined in a set rhythm.⁴

It is apparent from this complete statement of what a melody is that all the bricks of music are included. It is also clear from the analogy with the linguistic discourse that follows, that the combination of notes making up a melody cannot be grouped in any haphazard way. Just as a certain syntax is essential for language to make sense, so in music the sequencing must be along certain determined lines. And one of the important rules that govern the composition of melodies is the purpose for which a particular melody is composed.⁵ This, the final cause of a melody, is connected with the classification of the kinds of melodies which we shall discuss shortly.

Farabi divides music in different, but familiar, ways. Some of the subdivisions have special theoretical significance. We shall concentrate on these.

The first and most general way of referring to melody is that it is a group of audible tones whatever be their source. In principle this is meant to cover both vocal and instrumental music. The counterpart that is given, however, is melody that is joined to "letters of which words are composed that have meaning"⁶ The subdivision here is not into two coordinate parts, since the first, melody, is general and generic, while the second, melody with words, is strictly a subdivi-

³ *Ibid.*, p., 47

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 487-488

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 488-489

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47

sion of melody which here appears as its counterpart. Farabi seems to be saying that the term “melody” applies to whatever fulfills the conditions in the full definition of the term given above, no matter what source generates it. But it also applies in a special way to vocal music. This justifies singling it out as a category by itself in the sub-classification, rather than the expected counterpart, namely, instrumental music.

In the relation of priority and posteriority, each of the two given subsubdivisions has its share. By virtue of the generic character of the first, let us call it the unqualified sense of “melody”, it has logical priority over the second. But melody in the general sense can also be considered a step in aiming for the second, towards vocal melody.⁷ Furthermore, as we shall see when we discuss the origin of music, vocal melody has a temporal priority as well, although not over the generic sense, but over one other subdivision that generic sense hides under its wings, namely, instrumental music. In the development of music, vocal music came before instrumental music.

Another way of subdividing music follows from the Aristoxenian-like priority given to the primary substances of music: the sound of music given in auditory experience. This is a clear alternative to the non-auditory arithmetically calculable ratios that were the daily bread of the Pythagoreans, both ancient and medieval.

As composed, a piece of music is meant to be performed, and thus to be sensed or heard. But prior to performance it may be conceived or imaged, and it may not in fact be performed. Both varieties, the music that is performed or heard and the music that is not experienced as performed, are subdivisions of practical music, although the former has more of a claim on the term “practical”.⁸ One supposes that they both belong under the practical category because, to put it simply, they are forms of doing or making music rather than talking or discoursing about it.

And of course practical music is part of another way of subdividing music. Its counterpart is theoretical music. However, as a form of knowledge practical music is merely at the level of ‘that it is’ (*anna l-shayʿ*).⁹ One would have thought that since composing and performing are the managing of a skill that it would have been called a ‘knowing how’, but this does not correspond to any of the four classical questions. The point about this form of knowledge for Farabi, as it

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 55

was for Aristotle, is that this is a knowledge without a logos. In itself it is a competence in the doing of the individual thing produced in just the manner in which it is. What is lacking at the mere level of the practical is the knowledge of the primary principles for that science, and of what follows from these for any particular composition and performance. It is a knowledge of what would be correct or incorrect for any and all particular instances. This belongs to the theoretical science of music.

There is one final subdivision of music to take up. This is the division into the natural and the product of art. Already in discussing instruments Farabi divides these into the natural and the artificial. Examples of artificial instruments should be obvious. The listing and discussing of each of these fills the middle section of the *Kitāb*.

Natural instruments raise more interesting questions. One obvious example of a natural instrument is the ensemble of what produces the human sound. In his *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm* Farabi itemizes the human instrument as the larynx (*al-ḥanjarah*), the uvula (*al-lahāt*), "and then the nose".¹⁰ It is curious that the nose should count as an instrument. There is a vocal technique that Farabi is perhaps referring to in which the mouth is closed or nearly so, and the vocal sound is made to resonate through the nose. Strictly speaking, this does not make the nose a separate instrument, but rather an auxiliary part of one, in the way in which the body of a violin is the resonating chamber, a part of the total instrument. A head tone and a chest tone does not mean that heads and chests are separate instruments. But this is a minor matter.

The more significant use of the distinction between the natural and the artificial has to do *not* with instruments but with the question of what the primary substances in music are (*ashkhāṣu ḥādha l-ʿilm*). Many sciences have for subject matter, that is, their individual concrete instances, both natural and artificial phenomena. And it makes no difference which is which. For example, the geometrician covers both in his scope. The primary substances for that science are lines, circles, triangles, planes whatever their mode of existence.¹¹

In the case of music one can raise the question of whether there is a one to one correspondence between natural and artificial substances, on the one hand, and natural and artificial instruments, on the other. In other words, the question is whether artificial sounds are made by artificial instruments, and natural sounds by natural instruments.

¹⁰ *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm*, p. 105

¹¹ *Kitāb al-mūsīqī al-kabīr*, p. 88.

The classic example of natural instances of music is celestial music, and this—if there is any; we shall come to Farabi's rejection of that possibility shortly—is not produced by any instrument of any kind, at least not in the sense in which the (natural) human throat is an instrument. The Pythagoreans spoke of celestial music as the product of the motion of heavenly bodies. But such a motion, even if it produced sound, is not itself an instrument. Nor can the celestial spheres be referred to as instruments, except perhaps in the sense of 'that by which' the sound is produced.

So the Pythagoreans would have provided celestial music as an example of natural music for which there is no natural instrument producing it. Farabi would have granted that such would have been an example of a natural sound without a natural instrument, but that there is no such sound in fact.

Thus one should not confuse the natural-artificial distinction as it applies to instruments and the individual substances of music. Natural music, say of the spheres, is not produced by natural instruments. The latter does exist, for example the human throat, whereas, for Farabi, the instances of natural music, of the spheres, do not exist.

Natural Music and the Spheres

Whereas for most of the theoretical sciences the distinction between the natural and artificial is indifferent to the identification of their primary substances, in the case of music it is otherwise. At issue here is whether the classic instance of natural music, namely the music of the spheres, refers to anything at all in reality.

Farabi was the first major figure in Islam to follow Aristotle rather than the Pythagoreans on this point.

What the Pythagoreans believe about the heavenly bodies and the stars, that by their motion they produce harmonious tunes—that is false. It has been outlined in the science of nature that what they claim is not possible, for the heavens, the spheres and stars cannot (*lā yumkin*) produce sound by their movements.¹²

This is the only statement we could locate that explicitly rejects the possibility for heavenly bodies to make sound of any kind, let alone musical sound. And the passage does not say what according to natural science makes the production of such sound empirically impossible.

It is tempting to wonder whether Farabi might have ruled out heavenly music on logical grounds as well. For music is an art, its in-

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 89

stances the result of the purposeful use of sound and other elements as material. If this had been the route taken by Farabi then he could have said that even if it were possible from the scientific perspective for the heavenly bodies to make sound having pitch and duration, there is still the question of whether that could be *called* music, in the sense in which we use that term about any human art.

As far as we are aware Farabi does not make it a logical point, an issue of the definition of music as an art. Not only does he make it an issue for natural science, but he prefaces the point about what science has ruled out by saying that “*most* of the primary individuals for this science (music) exist by art and cannot exist by nature”¹³ (*jullu ashkh-āsh mawjūdāt hādha l-‘ilm yūjad bi-ṣinā‘ah wa lā yakād yūjad bi-ṭabī‘ah*). The crucial word here is “*jullu*” which means “most”. Even if we interpret that word to mean “for all practical purposes *all*”, there is still the possibility of at least one instance by nature, but, for Farabi, that is not going to be an instance of heavenly music.

It is possible that what he has in mind about natural music which is not artifice are those spontaneous instances of music-making, actually singing, which he mentions when he discusses the origin or birth of music as a phenomenon before it developed into high art. But that would be a sense of “natural” which means elemental, instinctive or spontaneous, by contrast with music that is consciously produced as composition. It is not quite the original sense of what happens without human intervention or artifice.

There is material in other writings by Farabi which is, or can be made relevant to the question of whether celestial music is possible. However, although such material can be seen to be relevant, the context does not explicitly suggest that Farabi himself is using it for that purpose. Furthermore, from a logical point of view, those considerations do not add up to a proof for the impossibility of celestial music, as it is claimed in the quotation about what has been outlined in natural science. The most they could do is to raise doubts about the case for celestial music.

In the essay *Fī mā yaṣuḥ wa lā yaṣuḥ min aḥkām al-nujūm* Farabi says that when he observed how composed melodies are in some instances concordant, in others discordant, and some more so in each respect than others, he realized that heavenly bodies could not have the tones that correspond to those melodies. Equally inapplicable would be the auspicious and inauspicious character of ‘our’ melodies.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89; italics supplied.

Furthermore, Farabi says,

it is generally agreed that the tones of a scale and (even) the signs of the Zodiac are by art not by nature, and there is absolutely no change or difference from this in nature.¹⁴

The first part of this argument simply expresses the implausibility of applying what pertains to 'our' melodies to the heavenly bodies. It is the second part in the above quotation that categorically denies that there are tones or melodies which are not by artifice, but it refers to nature, and it is not clear whether the heavenly spheres are part of nature in this sense. Furthermore, although the statement here is more categorical than in the earlier quotation about what is outlined in natural science where it is said that "most" musical sound is by artifice, the present quote is equally lacking in a reason as to why it is so. The logical option of dismissing heavenly music from the definition of music as art has been ruled out, as we have already noted.

The Ikhwan had argued that even though the nature of the heavenly bodies and that of objects in the sub-lunar orbit are sufficiently different to warrant treating the *falak* as a fifth nature, it still had enough similarity to the 'bodiness' of what is made out of the four elements to justify the claim that heavenly bodies can produce music.

Now Farabi admits that the heavenly bodies do share with objects in the sub-lunar orbit composition of matter and form.¹⁵ They also share in the fact that both have corporeality (*jismiyyah*), but the matter of the heavenly bodies is different from that of the world of the four elements. The form of the one is also different from that of the other. And so is the motion of the two. The heavenly bodies move in a fixed circular orbit, whereas sub-lunar objects have locational motion (*ma-kāniyyah*).¹⁶ Aristotle would have specified that as movement in a straight line, either towards the center for water and earth, or away from it in the case of fire and air.

This could give Farabi sufficient reason for denying music-making ability to the heavenly bodies, especially if the difference in the nature of the two is such that sound could not be produced by the heavenly ones should contact between them take place. But the application of all these points to the question of celestial sound is not made by Farabi in the passages alluded to.

There is one other line of reasoning used that could be made relevant to the question at hand, but which, again, is not made explicitly

¹⁴ *Fīm ā yaṣuḥ wa lā yaṣuḥ min aḥkām al-nujūm*, pp. 111-112

¹⁵ *Uyūn al-masā'il*, p. 60

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60

so by our philosopher.

In illustrating the penchant of astrologers for unfounded speculation and their being driven to faulty reasoning, he refers to the pitfalls of equivocal terms. These can lead one to make false claims about one thing just because it shares a name with another.¹⁷ None of the examples he gives are of celestial music, but clearly the case could be made, in the light of all that we have said on the matter, that the claim of, say the Ikhwan, about the capacity of the heavenly bodies to produce sound could be a case of being misled by the application of the term "corporeality" to both heavenly and earthly objects. The similarities as to corporeality and related properties may not be quite as distant as in the case of what shares equivocal terms, but the point remains that a sufficient difference would disqualify the inferences made.

Practical and Theoretical Music

Since natural music may be put aside for whichever reason, we are left with music which is the product of art. But this class now must be co-extensive with practical music, namely music that is brought into being by composition and performance. Thus the individual existents of the field of music are the products of practical art, of composing and performing, and these are what can be experienced by the auditory sense. And these are tones and melodies.¹⁸

As we remarked earlier, there is a relation of priority and posteriority between the two subdivisions of practical music. Composition is in time and by nature prior to performance. Even in the case of the impromptu or improvised piece that is composed in performance, the actual work as heard, one would suppose, must have been preceded by the set of sound images in the mind.

On the other hand, performance is the goal of composition. Even though a composition may not see the world of sound, it is composed in order to be heard. And this is the priority of performing. With this in mind, and in this sense, Farabi would endorse the claim that practical music is *essentially* a performing art. Or, in his words: actually performed and heard music is more properly called practical music.¹⁹ However, this does not prevent Farabi from declaring the ways in which primacy belongs to composition, as we have seen.²⁰

¹⁷ *Aḥkām al-nujūm*, pp. 108-109

¹⁸ *Kitāb al-mūsīqī al-kabīr*, p. 100

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 49, also p. 50

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 62

If then the individuals of music are essentially the product of art and the domain of practical music, what claim does theoretical music have on that label? Can the term “music” apply essentially to theoretical music? Despite the priority accorded to practical music, it is clear that, for Farabi, music is not just for the sake of practice. Like geometry and unlike carpentry, music is more than just a practical art. It is also a science. In the *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm* it is classified with the mathematical sciences, each of which is divided into the theoretical and the practical. These are the *ʿulūm al-taʿālīm*, the sciences which are theoretical in nature, but applied in practice.

Theory and practice are coordinated in another way, through the principle of priority and posteriority. They divide between them some of the classical principles of explanation. But first, we should put aside the efficient cause, for we are told this has no application in the mathematical sciences.²¹

Practical music, as we remarked earlier attains the level of the ‘that it is’. It is also like matter, theory is like form. The instances of practical music supply the material cause.²² Theory concerns itself with the ‘what it is’²³ As to the ‘why it is’, this is said not to be the business of the theoretical science of music.²⁴ Nor is it the business of practical music as such,²⁵ although within practical music performance is said to be that for the sake of which composition is attempted in the first place.

However, the theoretical inquiry into music does not look to performance as its goal. Nor does it study melody is so far as it emanates from a particular instrument or a particular material embodiment, but absolutely (*ʿala l-iṭlāq*). It would treat it as audible sound in a general way regardless of what the particular source happens to be.²⁶ This is consistent with the view stated earlier that the primary individuals even for theoretical music are audible instances of sound, but as studied in theory they need not be particular sounds emanating from a specific given source.

Furthermore, the musical theorist need not himself or herself be the producer of tones or melodies, nor is there need for that person to know how to produce any sound at all, namely to be a practicing mus-

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 90

²² *Ibid.*, p. 91

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 491 and p. 90

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 491

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 55

²⁶ *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm*, p. 106

ician. It is enough that the theorist can refer to what the practical musician does or can produce.²⁷

It would seem, then, that the theoretical and the practical fit together as part of a conceptually unified inquiry, that is integrally complete when taken together; and that theoretical music is to be called music essentially and not by accident. Farabi's division of music simply into the theoretical and the practical,²⁸ with all the built-in inclusions and exclusions we have just discussed, in effect formed a tight fence against the Pythagoreanism of Kindi and others like him in the Islamic tradition. Although clearly his intent was not just to hit the Pythagoreans. After all Aristotle before him distinguished between the theoretical and applied aspects of certain fields of inquiry, and in most areas of philosophy Farabi is a faithful follower of Aristotle.

At any rate if one were tracing the history of Pythagoreanism within the Islamic intellectual tradition, Farabi's stand is notable, and he will be joined later by Ibn Sina. Yet these two giants failed to dislodge the ideas of that Greek school. Well into the sixteenth century, as we noted in our first chapter, those ideas continued to be expressed. The issues were still alive so that Ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 1546) found it necessary to deny anew that the celestial spheres are capable of producing music.²⁹

III. *The Natural Origins of Music*

Farabi's view of the origin of music is in marked contrast to the one held by Kindi and the Ikhwan. According to these, human music originated when the Sages, and in certain passages Pythagoras is singled out, heard the celestial music and set down the rules for human music. These were then disseminated to others, and eventually music spread to all. This has all the earmarks of a myth, and we do not mean that in any negative sense. By contrast what Farabi offers, to be followed by Ibn Sina along rather similar lines, is a natural or naturalistic explanation.

Music is a product of certain instinctive dispositions (*fīṭar ghar ī-ziyyah*), according to Farabi. One of these sources, itself instinctually rooted, is poetry which has been implanted in humans ever since the

²⁷ *Kitāb al-mūsīqī al-kabīr*, pp. 100 ff.

²⁸ For a discussion of the reception of Farabi's distinction in the Latin Middle Ages, see Don M. Randel's "Al-Fārābī and the Role of Arabic Music Theory in the Latin Middle Ages" *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 29 (1976), pp.173-183.

²⁹ Shiloah, *The Theory*, p. 224

creation of the species. Poetry is a natural soil for music. The one just glides into the other. A second such instinctive source is the natural disposition of both humans and animals to use sounds for expressing the pleasant and unpleasant states and experiences they go through in life.³⁰

But there are more specific and more mundane sources: the human love of rest and recreation after toil and the wish to avoid fatigue and boredom during work. Farabi maintains that a sense of time as it passes invokes the feeling of fatigue. One therefore needs to resort to some kind of chanting to while away the time and the fatigue.

Then there is the discovery that animals respond to vocal music. The kind of humming or singing to camels, especially needed on long journeys, is called *al-ḥudāʾ*.³¹ This is a kind of chanting that in its pace and rhythm tends to match the camel's movements.

We suggested above that this could be an instance of natural music produced by a natural instrument, but we must be aware of the different sense of "natural" in "natural music" which would mean spontaneous, or not the product of high compositional art. Farabi encourages one to classify it as natural in this case, since he groups it together with the other natural or instinctive sources of music.

However, it is not altogether clear what is being called instinctive here. Surely singing to camels as such is not. So perhaps what is meant is that the journey with camels, often long and arduous for both humans and animals, the steady rhythmic movements of the camel, the desire to while away the time and boredom—a touch of the earlier source—and to shore up the camel's endurance, all this of itself, as it were, and without contrivance, just leads the travelling human into song; much as a material with all the conditions for combustion at the ready just bursts into flame. So in this context the birth of song is by some sort of spontaneous musical combustion. Of course, as one discovers the successful effects of the humming or singing on all concerned, this becomes a reinforcement for repeat performance.

The phenomena of music being thus naturally rooted in some or all the above conditions, music as a practical art gradually developed, as people with special talent began to compose with more deliberate construction and sophistication. As time went by, people, now indentified as musicians, began to aim, with increasing success, at maximizing the goals that may be achieved by well-organized grouping of tones, or melodies. We shall discuss the kinds and goals of melody shortly.

³⁰ *Kitāb al-mūsīqī al-kabīr*, pp. 70 ff.

Of special importance is the discovery that, as one moves away from humming and the use of meaningless syllables, words having meaning have more impact on the listener, even more so if the words themselves are organized in the higher art of poetry.³¹ With the advent of the dimension of words having meaning it became possible to adapt both words and music to the demands of particular occasions, whether these were festive or sad or whatever.³²

Instrumental music is a much later development, according to our author. It was made possible by the discovery that the natural manner of producing vocal sound can, in a sense, be replicated by artificial means, that is, by the use of what are to become musical instruments. Furthermore, it was discovered that the playing of musical instruments along with the vocal melody enhanced the pleasure and effectiveness derived from that melody. With the invention of the *'ūd*, or lute, and the rest of the instruments, "practical music as an art became complete and the subject of melody well established".³³ From there it was but a simple step to find that instruments can be used to 'sing' on their own, so to speak.

As to the valuational ranking of vocal versus instrumental music, vocal music will be raised not only because it appeared first in the order of time, but also because it embodies poetry which is a more effective agent in achieving the goals of the various kinds of melody, as we shall see. Vocal music has the edge because of the effectiveness of its poetic ingredient.

IV. *Music and the Listener*

We turn now to the discussion of music from the perspective of the listener, the types of melodies and their effect on the listener, and the place of music in the economy of human values.

Farabi speaks of three kinds of melody, which he identifies in terms of the goals they serve, that is, in terms of their effects on the listener. Since he acknowledges that the best melodies serve all three goals at once, his notion of a "kind of melody" must refer to the melody that predominantly serves one or another of the three goals.

First. This is the melody that delights the listener, pleases and gives rest to the soul.³⁴ But that is all that it can deliver. One would suppo-

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 73

³² *Ibid.*, p. 74

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 75

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62

se that this a kind of simple melody, instrumental or vocal, that makes no demands on the mind of the listener, and if it is a song, the words are not ones that require special deciphering and attention. This would probably be the popular song that Katib will discuss later when he laments the superficial taste prevalent in his time.

Second. This kind of melody offers another level to the listener. It is not just the shere fact that this kind of melody has words, but it has the sort of words that evoke images in the mind, much as the best poetry does. Farabi draws an analogy with the statues that one can see. These may be simply suffused with visual elegance and nothing more. Or, they may in addition represent in the soul of the viewer the appearances of things, and their dispositions and character traits, much as the statues of ancient Greece and India did for the heroes they addulated and the gods they worshiped.³⁵ In the case of melodies, the images suggested and the representations evoked in the listener are a function of the poetic power of words as married to the appropriate musical idiom which in its turn enhances the effectiveness of the words.

Third. This is the affective dimension of music. Sounds have an expressive and communicative function in the life of humans and animals. Both species use sounds for their life experiences, of what is pleasurable and what is harmful. Animals even use sounds as signs in calling oneanother. This becomes especially true of the human species when they have speech at their disposal. Animal sounds have a brute expressiveness to them, but the linguistic signs used by humans have a semantic function. This difference apart, both animals and humans resort to non-linguistic sounds when they experience delight, or sadness or fear, or anger.³⁶

We shall see in our next chapter how Ibn Sina takes this idea and develops it with the greater fullness and sophistication that are characteristic of his way, in order to explain the origin of music, especially vocal music. Farabi makes double use of it. Here it explains a kind of melody and thus a kind of objective that melodies can serve. But in a brief and casual mention, it appears in his own account of the origin of music, as we saw earlier.

The three kinds of melody, the pleasing, the image-evoking and the affective can reinforce oneanother in combination. A pleasing melody can add to the affective impact as can the image-evoking melody, for

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63

³⁶ *Ibidem.*

the poetry can be the instrument for producing the affective and character traits which are the goal of the third kind of melody, the affective. This clearly leads to the conclusion that the most perfect melody is the one that combines all three goals. The perfect melody can produce the affective states and traits by its suggestive poetry which is carried enhancedly by a pleasing melody.³⁷ This obviously implies that the most perfect melody has to be vocal, the vocal melody which emanates from a human throat.³⁸

Given these kinds of melody and the respective implicit goals for each kind, Farabi's discussion of the science-art of music will now have to be supplemented by a discussion of how each of these goals can be achieved in composition and performance. But such material as he might provide can also serve the listener as a standard in terms of which such a listener can respond in appreciation or criticism.

This is one way in which the theoretician and his kind of inquiry is of help to the practical musician. It shows the indispensability of theory in guiding the practical art of composing and performing. If Y is the goal of melody, then do X to achieve Y. This can serve a double function, for the recommendation to the practical musician can also serve as a statement of what the good-making features are in composition and performance. This in turn can be of service to the listener as well, by providing him or her with that by which to measure the success or failure of what one hears.

However, one would hesitate to propose that Farabi is consciously offering a theory of criticism. For he says:

As to the satisfaction in listening, the condition in which one discerns the good and the bad in melodies, this cannot be called an art (*sina'ah*), for no human is devoid of this (capacity), either by nature or by habit.³⁹

Any recipe concerning the good-making ingredients in composing and performing melodies presupposes a view of what counts as the distinctive features or characteristics of music as heard. Thus in fact, having identified the three goals of melody, Farabi discusses how each can be achieved. And he does this by giving the characteristics of music as heard, and of poetry for the image-evoking goal, under each one of the goals. For example, the first goal of melody is to produce pleasure and repose in the listener. Clear tone, mellow tone, fluidity of

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 68

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50

sound, a special sort of intensity in vocal production and other vocal techniques identified by name;⁴⁰ these and other features of sound as sound, are all first-goal enhancing.

But the list of these good-making characteristics serves at the same time as a list of how the surface aspect of melody may be described, namely, how to describe the sensuous aesthetic characteristics. It is very much worth noting that Farabi is explicitly aware, as are modern Western aestheticians, of the problem of finding descriptive vocabulary in talking about music. Many of the characteristics we hear and value have no names. And this is true of the characteristics under all the three goals of melody.⁴¹

The second goal, that of image-evocation, is primarily a function of the words and their meaning, and of the various aspects of poetry, but the characteristics of the melody can assist in the understanding of the words, and thereby enhance their evocative impact. One example of this is *al-tartil*, the slow and clear enunciation of a song. Another, the *hadr*, is a slight speeding up or *accelerando*. As for the requisite on the side of poetry, Farabi refers the reader to what is given in the disciplines of rhetoric and poetics.⁴²

The affects which pertain to the third goal of melody, are classified into three groups: those that strengthen the soul, like anger, harshness, antagonism. Then there are the soul-softening affects like fear, apprehension, mercy, cowardice. The third kind is in-between, in the sense of being a mixture of the two, as he puts it. The melodies are between the strong and the soft. These melodies give the soul calm and tranquility.⁴³

Yet the effects of melodies in their affective and image-evoking roles is broader than simply in bringing about the specific states and correlative traits already mentioned. A whole spectrum of character traits and moral qualities can also result which in turn could lead to the requisite action and behavior.⁴⁴

Beyond all the sort of effects we have mentioned, music has a place in the broader life of humans, and fits into the larger economy of values. Life can have serious goals and less serious goals. The ultimate goal of the serious direction is final happiness. Frivolous goals such as diversion and play have their place in life, in that their mome-

⁴⁰ See *Ibid.*, p. 1172-1174

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp 1175 & 1178

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 1177

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 1179 ff.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1181

nts refresh and reinvigorate our dedication and search for the ultimate happiness. Farabi refers to Aristotle's saying that these frivolous pursuits should be in one's life in the amount we use salt in food.

But it so happens that play when contrasted with hardship makes the populous believe that play is like happiness and hardship like misery. They thus get entrenched in going after play, and after more and more of it, they in effect alienate themselves from the true path towards ultimate happiness.

Both music and poetry have the same high place in human life, but they both suffer the same fate at the hand of the populace. In song the two are intertwined, and the preoccupation with play leads people to demand that, poetry and the music with it, serve their thirst for play. One can easily see, says Farabi, why the interpreters of the Islamic Law should turn against play and diversion and the music that caters to these.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 1183 ff.

CHAPTER FOUR

IBN SINA

In several areas of philosophy, Ibn Sina often takes ideas briefly expressed by Farabi and, in the expansive and systematic manner characteristic of him, develops them and makes them resoundingly assertive and important theory. This is true of the present area of our discussion, the philosophy of music.

Ibn Sina sides with Farabi against the Islamic Pythagoreans on what should be the proper focus of the theoretical inquiry of music. Like Aristoxenus before him, the science of music is redirected to inquire into the principles and elements of music itself as an auditory phenomenon. And with focus on music proper, Ibn Sina develops what may be the first explicit aesthetics of music in Islamic thought.

Furthermore, Ibn Sina accepts Farabi's explanation of the origin of music as part of the larger account of the origin and function of sound (*al-ṣawt*) in the life of the animal species. At the hands of Ibn Sina, however, although generic sound and music, its offshoot, are part of the same account, meaningful sound plays a different role in the life of the species than does music. The latter grew out of the same soil as sound in general, but whereas *al-ṣawt* played a role in the survival and intracommunication of each species, music became abstracted from that functional role.

Let us first discuss Ibn Sina's approach to the study of music, and his rejection of Pythagoreanism.

I. *The Approach to Music*

In the *Shifā'*, Ibn Sina follows the tradition established in Islam by Kindi of classifying music as a mathematical science. Thus in the third section of the book on mathematics, he turns to music. The material in this section of the *Shifā'* is his most important and complete treatment of music. What has been called the music section of the *Najāt* is, like the rest of that book, a summary of the main discussion in the *Shifā'*. The section on music in the *Dānish Nāmā* is said by Farmer to be the same text as the *Najāt* summary.¹

¹ Farmer, *A History of Arabian Music*, p. 219. See also Shiloah, *The Theory*, p.213

The importance of the treatment of music in the *Shifā'*, for our purpose here lies in a feature of that discussion besides its relative fullness and completeness. For the introduction to the book on music in the *Shifā'* is the only place where Ibn Sina presents his ideas on what we are calling the philosophy of music, as distinguished from music theory in the strict sense. The latter kind of discussion is what fills the main portion of the book on music in the *Shifā'* and the more abridged writings already mentioned.

This brief introduction is devoted to a discussion of those aspects of music that delight us and why it is that they do. His remarks there contain the rudiments of a theory which combines aesthetic analysis with a psycho-biological account of our aesthetic appreciation.

Perhaps because he thought he was breaking new ground, or perhaps because he thought his ideas might strike the reader as too speculative, Ibn Sina tells us that this introduction is not the usual sort that precedes his discussion of the other sciences. He then proceeds to assure us that nonetheless his ideas are based on reliable experience and sound intuition.²

The Introduction opens with a very significant statement which we translate here in full.

It is time for us to conclude the mathematical branch of philosophy and set forth a compendium of the science of music, limiting ourselves to what is essential to it and part of its conception, and what follows from its principles and elements. We shall not stretch our discussion with numerical and arithmetical principles and corollaries, for these one may seek from the science of arithmetic. We shall also ignore the similarities between the heavenly bodies and human character traits (on the one hand) and the ratios of musical intervals (on the other). This is the way of those for whom the sciences have not been distinguished the one from the other, and it has not become clear to them what is essential and what is accidental.

They are a people with an ancient philosophy which has been inherited in its entirety and emulated by those negligent ones who have otherwise understood the instructive philosophy and the truth-seeking analysis. This distractedness brought on by emulation, a heedlessness shielded by the high esteem for the ancients, has led to the (uncritical) acceptance. This habit deflects one from the truth; it is a pliant attitude that blocks careful thought.

In so far as we are able, we shall try to discern the truth itself, and resist the pull of tradition, realizing, however, that care and caution tend to protect one from error most of the time, but not always.³

² *Shifā'*, p. 4

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

In his book *Mūsīqā al-Kindi*, Zakariyyā Yūsuf mentions this passage and explains some of the groups to which Ibn Sina is most likely referring. Thus “people with an ancient philosophy” refers to the Greek philosophers, while “inherited in its entirety” is a reference to Kindi. Furthermore, “those negligent ones”, according to Yūsuf, is directed at the Ikhwan al-Şafa, and, finally, “the instructive philosophy and the truth-seeking analysis” refers to Farabi.⁴

This lengthy quotation has several other interesting things about it.

Even though one can point to the influence of Farabi and Aristoxenus before him on this attitude towards the Pythagoreans, both ancient and Islamic, it does show Ibn Sina’s spirit of (relative) independence, in his philosophy of music which coheres with his spirit in the rest of his thought. It may well be the most explicit statement of such an attitude in his writings.

The second point of special interest, is that Ibn Sina accepts the classification of music as one of the mathematical sciences. Ever since the translation into Arabic of the works on music by Euclid, Ptolemy, Pythagoras and others it became common practice in Islam to make that classification. Of course within Islam, Kindi and Farabi had already done so. Thus the title of Ibn Sina’s book on music reads: “Chapter Three of the mathematical sciences which is on the science of music.”⁵

This, however, does not prevent Ibn Sina from rejecting the Pythagorean-type approach to music theory which considers numbers as the essential key to the understanding of music. Ibn Sina certainly recognizes that intervals, for example, can be discussed in terms of ratios. What he rejects is that this fact about intervals in music is essential to the phenomenon of music as an auditory experience.

The third point of interest about the long passage we quoted is the way Ibn Sina extends the divorce between the musical and the non-musical to the aspect of imitation (*muḥākāt*). Two relations of similarity are at stake: one between music and the forms and movements of heavenly bodies (*al-ashkāl al-samāwiyyah*), the other is that between music and human character traits (*al-akhlāq al-nafsāniyyah*).

As to the relation with the heavenly bodies, Farabi before him had rejected the similarity between our music and heavenly music, but on grounds different from those of Ibn Sina. Farabi had rejected the claim that the heavenly bodies make any kind of sound, musical or non-musical, saying that the falsehood of this claim has been outlined

⁴ Zakariyyā Yūsuf, *op. cit.*, p. 32

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3

in natural science. This forecloses the possibility of claiming any similarity between heavenly and earthly musics.

What Ibn Sina seems to be saying is that even if the heavenly bodies were to be capable of producing music as they whirl through their orbit, whatever the resultant similarity may be between that music and human musical compositions, that is at best accidentally relevant to the theoretical study of our music. Those who make these extra-musical connections confuse what is accidental with what is essential, as the above quotation declares. This of course applies to the arithmetical connections as we have just seen, but it is also meant to apply to the similarities between music and human character traits, as will be apparent later in this chapter.

Now if one is to draw the boundaries in the study of music by means of the accidental-essential distinction, this does not preclude one from making extra-musical references and comparisons. These are still possible. Thus when Ibn Sina declares the autonomy of the science of music he is thereby stating that any such extra-musical connections as may exist and may be made, would not guide us in the understanding of the essential nature of music. Ibn Sina, as we shall see, will talk about the similarity between music and human character traits, but this similarity is neither central to the nature of music, nor is it the source of the greatest enjoyment we derive from listening to music.⁶

The Introduction with which the above long quotation opens, presents at least two difficulties. First, because the ideas are stated there in germinal fashion rather than fully worked out, there is the danger of reading too much theory into what is there. We realize that, as Ibn Sina said, "care and caution tend to protect one from error most of the time but not always". We hope to proceed with appropriate care.

There is another difficulty. Except for the opening sentence in which Ibn Sina declares his intentions to turn to music after having just concluded mathematics, the word "*mūsīqī*" does not appear in the Introduction. In one place he does refer to musical intervals (*al-ab'ād al-mūṣiqiyyah*), but that is still part of his opening paragraph before he begins his philosophy of music.

The main discussion in the Introduction concerns sound (*al-ṣawt*), and is mostly limited to the sound used in communication by mem-

⁶ The three points just concluded and the quoted passage are with slight alterations adapted from Shehadi "Art and Imitation: Plato and Ibn Sina", in *Of Scholars, Savants and Their Texts: Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman*, edited by Ruth Link-Salinger.

bers of the animal and human species. Ibn Sina is not talking here about the sounds emitted by volcanos or thunder or falling trees. He is speaking as a biologist not as a physicist, and the sound of which he speaks is Aristotle's sound as voice. The question is whether his account of the natural place and function of sound as voice is also meant as an account of the origin of music.

Some bird calls and dolphin calls are sent out in sound having pitch and have some of the other primitive characteristics of a composition such as pitch having duration, and a sequencing of those pitches in a way akin to melody. One may almost speak of music here. Al-Jāhīdh had maintained⁷ that certain animals (elephants and birds), and even some insects, are capable of producing something like measured song. But one must say that the sounds of most animals in their interaction with one another and with their natural environment are unlike the calls of birds and dolphins. In the case of humans, if we keep the biological perspective and the natural setting, their distinctive tool of communication, as Ibn Sina explicitly says, is articulate speech.⁸ It is not music. Humans, of course, compose music, but a song, whatever its function, is not a bird call.

The difficulty is this. In the Introduction under discussion, Ibn Sina clearly offers a functionalist account of sound, meaningful sound, in the lives of animals and humans. But is this functionalist account also an account of the origin and function of music, the music that Ibn Sina is about to study in the rest of his book?

From the few initial distinctions we have made between *al-ṣawt* and *al-mūsīqā*, and in the light of what will follow, our inclination is to interpret the Introduction as giving a functionalist account of the more general phenomenon of *al-ṣawt* not of *al-mūsīqā*. We shall try shortly to explain the use that Ibn Sina makes of this functionalist account of *al-ṣawt* in saying what we think he wants to say about *al-mūsīqā*.

In this interpretation we differ from Maḥmūd al-Ḥifnī who has presented Ibn Sina as the author of a functionalist account of the origin of music (*nashʾat al-mūsīqā*) of the sort one finds in Darwin, or of music as a functional language of expression as in Herbert Spencer.

Let us now turn to Ibn Sina's functionalist account of *al-ṣawt*.

⁷ *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, Vol. I, p. 35

⁸ *Shifāʾ*, p. 8

II. *AL-ŞAWT*

The natural order provides animals and humans with opportunities and confronts them with restrictions. One of the tools in responding to or coping with these challenges is the capacity to produce sound (or voice). Ibn Sina thinks of this as a means of communication among members of the species.

Interestingly enough, and unlike some other functional biological approaches to human capacities, the primary function of meaningful sound for the animal species is not to fight for one's own survival in a hostile world. Rather, meaningful sound helps to bring together members of the opposite sex, since they are ordinarily separated from one another. In this way the species is perpetuated.⁹ It is primarily an offspring, species-oriented, not an individual, self-oriented view.

However, there are other elementary functions served by meaningful sound, and these concern the individual itself, such as calling for assistance (a child calling its mother) and warning about danger (a parent warning its offspring). Here the element of survival in a hostile environment is recognized, although the call for assistance need not be only when there is danger.

In the case of human beings, the needs go beyond the ones already mentioned. We are driven by the need to convey to others what is within our selves. This sort of sharing and communication overcomes the isolation (*al-infirād*) which restricts the possibilities of human life. It is obvious that at the practical level more can be accomplished with the help of others.¹⁰

Such in broad outline is Ibn Sina's functionalist account of the place of meaningful sound in the animal and human kingdoms. Only in the exceptional case of the voices of a few animal species can that be taken as account of anything like music. As we noted earlier most sounds voiced by animals and humans have no pitch, and having pitch—with duration—is a minimal condition for any sound to be a musical sound.

Furthermore, music, besides the requirement of pitch, must have clear intervals (*ab^cād*) which are arranged to form melody (*al-laḥn*) and rhythm (*al-ʾiqāʿ*).¹¹ We may have some birds still with us, but

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9

we certainly have left most of the animal kingdom behind us. Finally, and more importantly, music, whatever else it does, must at least delight the listener by the qualities of its sound, its organization and its expressive character. A meaningful sound created by humans may be about love and the need to overcome loneliness, but, as we said earlier, a song is not a mating call—perhaps some are! Even our birds have left us by now.

Of course a mating call works because it delights and attracts, but it still functions as a mating call. In the case of music, whatever it does in releasing or communicating emotion, or curing mental states, to delight is its distinctive function. As Ibn Sina puts it when he considers intervals: one should not choose intervals just because they can be constructed, or because they are correct or beneficial, rather because they are better, and to be better means to delight the soul (*wa amr al-mūsīqā mabnī ‘ala al-afḍal, li-annah li-ifādat al-ladhdhah al-naḥsā-niyyah*).¹²

The similarities between Farabi and Ibn Sina on the subject of the origin of sound and music are few but important. The first point of agreement is in the general approach, especially by contrast with the Islamic Pythagoreans. Both Farabi and Ibn Sina chose a naturalistic rather than a mythical explanation of the origin of music. On specific points they agree that meaningful sound is instinctively used by humans and animals for expressing and communicating.

Where they differ is in the way music as such relates to this instinctive source. Ibn Sina gives this source a broader function than just that of expressing the pleasant and unpleasant states and experiences humans and animals go through. But insofar as music and meaningful sound in general are placed in the role of reacting to the pleasant and unpleasant, this gives, Farabi in particular, a more direct route for music itself to spring from such an instinctive source. For music in its sad and happy modes can be seen as such expressive outgrowths of the pleasant and unpleasant life experiences. For Farabi, the same source can be used to explain the origin of both meaningful sound in general and music in particular.

On the other hand, with Ibn Sina expanding the functions of sound in the life of the human and animal species, music is less likely to be directly rooted in the same natural circumstances. Music would not grow out of the function of meaningful sound for alerting the young about dangers lurking in the environment, or out of the use of such

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 20

sound by the young in asking for help. It would also be difficult to see how music can emerge from the use of sound for calling for a mate. One could see love songs and love poetry echoing such a function, but this is not made explicit by Ibn Sina, nor does it seem to be the point he is trying to make in his account of meaningful sound in general, as we shall explain further on in this chapter.

The only specific source-condition left is the need to share with others of one's species what is within one's self. This need to communicate could be a more likely direct source for the origin of music, if it were the case that Ibn Sina adopts a communication theory of music. We shall come back to this, but only after taking up Ibn Sina's aesthetics of sound and of music.

III. *The Aesthetics of Sound and Music*

The first thing we enjoy in music are the surface or sensible qualities of sound. According to Ibn Sina, sounds as such are either of a kind that pleases our sense of hearing or of a kind that offends it. Sounds may also affect us by their intensity or excessiveness (*al-ifrāt*). They may be too loud or too sudden. This aspect is distinct from whether the sound pleases or offends because of the kind it is.¹³

Ibn Sina makes the analogy with smells some of which please or offend by the kind they are regardless of intensity. For instance, the odor of decomposed organic matter is offensive even when it is not intense. Then, on the other hand, taking the analogy from sight, Ibn Sina says that what is congenial as to its kind such as sunlight, may still disturb by virtue of its intensity.¹⁴

But of course sound or tone as an ingredient in music is not enough by itself. For, as Ibn Sina says beyond the Introduction, a note (*al-nagmah*) if repeated on the same pitch offers no variety and does not constitute music as musical composition.¹⁵ Thus there are, according to our author, two other aspects of sound or music that can be a source of enjoyment or annoyance.

Paranthetically, we should mention that even though, in this passage from which we are now drawing material, he is still using the term "*al-ṣawt*" not "*al-mūsīqā*", it should be evident that he has music in mind. And some of what he says about music here would apply

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 4

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14

to poetry as well, a subject he treats in the course of his book on music as well as in his commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*.

Poetry, like music, is used for the pleasure of imitation, and we learn the use of imitation in childhood, and find it delightful. Furthermore, poetry, again like music, is created because of our natural love of harmonious combination and melodies. And the idea that poetry has its own rhythm, harmony and tune is a theme that is repeated in Arabic writings from the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* to Ibn Khaldun and beyond.

In speaking of the characteristic features of the poetry of the Arabs and the Greeks, Ibn Sina says that the former wrote lyrical poetry for wonder and pleasure. It was essentially formalistic, stressing composition of images and syntax. The Greeks, on the other hand, wrote dramatic poetry with a social function, with imitations of actions and emotions for both learning and pleasure. This contrasts with the Arabs who in their lyric poetry aimed to affect the soul, but with a non-ethical non-dydactic ethos; above all for pleasure.¹⁶

The dovetailing of Ibn Sina's aesthetics of music and poetry is of special interest. It shows a consistent aesthetics for both arts.

In music the two aspects that go beyond sheer sound are, first, *al-nidhām*, the order or arrangement of notes and intervals into melody and rhythm, and the organization of these in turn into a complete composition. This is *ta'līf* or composition. The second aspect is *al-ḥikāyah* or *al-muḥākāt*, the similarity between music, on the one hand, and natural processes and human traits, on the other.¹⁷

These two aspects of music, order and similarity, address themselves beyond our sense of hearing as such. They address our discerning faculty (*al-quwwah al-mumayyizah*)¹⁸ One could call the ordered aspect of music its formal aspect in that it concerns the organized relationships of the elements of music. One can then call the aspect of similarity between music and human and natural traits the imitative aspect. But since the traits in question are what is usually understood in aesthetic discussions to be the expressive character of music—sad, joyous, flowing, aggressive, etc.—we may also refer to this as the expressive aspect of music.

We shall first give an idea of Ibn Sina's perception of these aspects before turning to the causal question of why we enjoy them.

¹⁶ See Avicenna's *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*, tr. with critical study by Ismā'īl Dahyah, the Introduction and Ch 2 of the translated text.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5, also pp. 8-9

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5

The Imitative-Expressive Aspect

The expressive qualities are referred to mostly in terms of the effect of music or sound on the listener. He says

If the the melody resembles one of the qualities (*al-shamā'il*), it is as if the soul has conformed to that quality and to whatever pertains to it.¹⁹

In another passage he speaks of the way sounds, understood here to include musical sounds and compositions, tranquilize if one is sad or pained, and how they help release any intense emotion whether joyous or injurious.²⁰ It is not hard to see how Ibn Sina the physician can turn to the therapeutic value²¹ of what he discerns as an aesthetician.

Like Kindi, Ibn Sina was known to have used music in his practice as a physician. One of his sayings that singing is the best practice for preserving health, acquired proverbial status among the Medieval Latins: "*inter omnia exercitia sanitatis cantare melius est*".²²

In our earlier discussion of the place of sound in the lives of human beings, we mentioned the desire to communicate as one of the strong motives for the use of meaningful sound, especially of articulate speech. This represents the social function of meaningful sound. If Ibn Sina were to apply this account to music, we would have the equivalent of a communication theory of music, and it would have been the right place for Ibn Sina to introduce the idea of the similarity between the music and human character traits. For music cannot communicate human affects in the abstract and indirect manner that language does. Music will have to, in some way, replicate or imitate the affective aspects of our psychic life. In this instance, under the communication theory, imitation would have to become an essential part of music, instead of the accidental place assigned to it by Ibn Sina.

However, our author seems to resist extending the social communication function of articulate sound to the analysis of music. For, once he discusses music his interest switches from the explanation of why an activity, such as articulating sound, comes about and what its biological and social functions are, to a consideration of what it is that we enjoy about it as a musical phenomenon. Here the functional biologist of meaningful sound gives way to the aesthetician of music.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7

²¹ *Al-Qānūn*, pp. 124-126

²² Quoted in Arnold, T. W. *The Legacy of Islam*, p. 376

It is interesting that this imitative or expressive aspect of music is not limited to human emotions and character traits. It also covers human behavior beyond the affective, such as reduction in loudness, drive or thrust, acceleration and so on.²³ In human life these are of course adjusted to the situation at hand. We lower our voice when there is caution or weakness, or when we seek mercy. There is thrust or assertiveness when we threaten or show strength. Furthermore, these adjectives can be used not only in describing human behavior, but in describing both music and the processes of nature.

Moreover, although Ibn Sina acknowledges that imitation in music is a source of pleasure, this still does not make the imitative function a key to the nature of music, as we have already observed.

A further point concerns a familiar question in general aesthetics, namely, the question of whether the idea of imitation in music refers to some inherent character in the music itself, or just refers to certain effects that the music has on a listener, or both. Unfortunately we do not have much text to go on. The beginning of one passage, already quoted, seems to suggest that similarity and evocation are distinct, but that can take more than one interpretation. Ibn Sina says: "If the melody resembles one of the qualities, it is as if the soul had conformed to that quality." The if-clause could refer to a distinct feature, similarity, which produces like effects on the listener. Yet the phrase "it is as if" (*fa-ka'annaha*) is ambiguous. It could refer to a fact besides similarity, or it could be a translation of what the vocabulary of similarity in music boils down to: talk about the effect of music on the listener.

In a different passage,²⁴ Ibn Sina talks about the way sounds, including music, tranquilize if one is sad or pained, and of how those melodies release intense emotions either joyous or sad. Here Ibn Sina speaks simply the language of effects on the listener. Yet the matter is complicated by the fact that many a state of the soul can be altered by music of any of a number of different characters that do not have that one to one chameleon-type similarity relationship assumed by the passage which says "it is as if the soul conforms to that quality" which the music imitates. As far as the effects on the listener, no correspondence in kind is necessary. Often the occasion of listening to music whatever its character can alter one's psychic state. No theory of imitation is needed in that case.

²³ *Shifā'*, p. 8

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7

The Formal Aspect

As to the aspect of order or organization, what we called the formal aspect, Ibn Sina's brief discussion of it will seem remote from the world of formalist analysis, for it is stated in impressionistic terms. He speaks in poetic metaphor about how we stir joyfully at the appearance of the first melody as we do when we come upon someone or something we like, then we are anxious about its impending disappearance. This is followed by the appearance of another melody replacing the first from which we separate in turn, and then are happily united with the first. Like many points in Ibn Sina's writings on music this is echoed by his student Ibn Zayla.²⁵

This impressionistic and associational language does not seem like the analysis of the formal structure of a musical composition. Yet Ibn Sina would most likely consider it as something like a formal analysis, for he concludes the passage, with what one may call the moral of the analysis, by saying that *al-nidhām* in music (order, organization) is the most pleasing thing for the self.²⁶ It is the coming and going and coming again of these melodies that gives the greatest delight. Whatever else melodies may do, the greatest pleasure derived by the listener comes from the organizational occurrence and recurrence in the musical composition.

The very fact that the function of melodies in so far as they bear or imitate emotions and other traits, namely their imitative-expressive function, is subordinated in aesthetic enjoyment to the structural or formal aspect of musical composition, lends further credibility to characterizing Ibn Sina's philosophy of music as one that finds a place for the imitative function of music, but which considers imitation as neither the key to the essence of music nor its most pleasing aspect. This may well be one further way in which Ibn Sina declares his independence from the ancient Greek masters.

To make the very imitative go under, as it were, in the service of another aspect of music is to place the imitative aspect at a good distance from its Platonic centrality, in either the definition of music as art or in its evaluation. Ibn Sina thus remains true to the promise he made in the opening passage of his Introduction.²⁷

²⁵ *Al-Kāfi fī l-mūsīqā*, p. 20

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9

²⁷ Shehadi in Link-Salinger, *op. cit.*, p. 225. Material for the last two sections was adapted from this source also.

IV. *The Functional and the Aesthetic*

We have grouped the material of the Introduction to the book on music under two questions: (1) What do we enjoy in music? and (2) What is the place of meaningful sound in animal and human life?

In answering the first, Ibn Sina, the aesthetician, says that we enjoy the qualities of sound as sound, but more importantly we enjoy the reflection in music of qualities we know and recognize in the human and natural world outside music. Most of all, we enjoy the order and organization in music.

In answer to the second question about the place of music in the life of the species, Ibn Sina offers a functionalist account of the usefulness of communication by voice or meaningful sound in the life situations that confront animal and human individuals and species.

What is the relation between the aesthetic analysis of music and the functionalist analysis of sound? We would like to propose the following thesis: that the aesthetic analysis pinpoints what we as a matter of fact enjoy in music. The functionalist account of the more general phenomenon of sound, however, supplies a kind of explanation of why we enjoy what we do in music.

Ibn Sina opens the substantive part of his Introduction with a preliminary statement of the three aspects of music we enjoy: 1. the qualities of sound as sound. 2. the similarities in expressive qualities between music and human and natural states and processes, and 3. the organization of the melodies in a musical composition. Then he says that it would be appropriate now for him to explain this.²⁸ And it is at this point that Ibn Sina turns to the biological context and introduces his account of the uses of sound in human and animal life.

How does the functionalist account serve as an explanation of why we enjoy those three mentioned aspects of music?

Ibn Sina's answer is that the desire for sound and for its expressive qualities and functions has been instilled in us by the life experiences depicted in the functionalist analysis.

There is in all animals, Ibn Sina says, a natural desire for sound "for the reason given", namely its biological usefulness.²⁹ This is especially true of humans because articulate speech is their main bio-

²⁸ *Shifāʾ*, p. 5

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7

logical and social tool.³⁰ We assume that the time in which we are collectively in the state of using meaningful sound in the functional way, is with us always. Ibn Sina's account does not read like a theory about a 'state of nature' located in some abstracted period of time.

All these experiences with sound in the functional mode have instilled in us a natural longing for it apart from the functional context, so that we turn to it at any time for its tranquilizing and releasing effects in moments of pain or sadness.³¹

Then Ibn Sina proceeds to say that if such sound is enhanced and adorned by properly proportioned composition and congruent organization, then its effect on the soul is more stirring.³² For we have a discerning faculty that is drawn to the more subtle elements of order in musical composition. The poet, we are told, differs from many of us by such a power which is beyond mere sense, and poets are also drawn to sound for the reason that applies to the rest of us.³³

This seems to suggest that whereas our life experiences make us especially receptive and drawn to the world of meaningful sound and its expressive effects, our discerning faculty enables us to switch gears from the preoccupation with the biological and social uses of sound to an appreciation of the specific subtleties of composition in themselves.

Yet even here, and especially in our appreciation of the most non-functional and most enjoyable of the aspects of a musical composition, namely, its organizational or formal aspect, Ibn Sina offers an explanation that indirectly connects with his functionalist account.

You recall the passage in which he gives the impressionistic reactions to melodies that come and go, and then concludes by declaring that order is the most enjoyable aspect of music. To this he adds, giving the causes of the derived pleasure (*asbāb al-ladhdhah*) :

... the causes of pleasure, sensing a sudden encounter, the pain of losing it.... then bidding it sudden farewell, the loneliness from the departure followed by the joy in its return as with the soul's loved one.³⁴

The aesthetic delight in the melody's orderly cycle is made analogous to, and in a way explained by the relation with a loved one in real life outside music. He seems to explain why the self loves the organization and order in music by the dramatized similarity between our re-

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7

³² *Ibidem.*

³³ *Ibidem.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9

action to the sequencing of melodies in a composition and the alternation in real life between the pleasure at meeting what or whom we love, and the sorrow of parting therefrom.

We have here an explanation of our enjoyment of the formal aspect of music by an analogical reference to certain life experiences. And although these life experiences are not, in the passage just quoted, linked directly with his general functional account of meaningful sound, it is not unfair to assume, in the spirit of his earlier explanations of the other aspects of music, namely, the surface or sensuous and the expressive, that our training in those real life situations in which meaningful sound serves its many functions, has made us more attuned to respond to the many features of life's experiences that are somehow reflected in that world of organized sound which we call music.

CHAPTER FIVE

AL-ḤASAN AL-KĀTIB

I. *Placing Katib and His Book*

Al-Ḥasan Ibn ʿAlī Ibn Aḥmad al-Kātib (d. 11th C.) is not a well known writer in the history of Islamic thought. His last name which means “the writer” derives from his occupation as a municipal secretary. His credentials as a philosopher, or at least as a philosopher of music, would not get the highest rating, and he is highly eclectic. Yet he deserves attention on at least two counts.

First, he has put together in an interesting way ideas from his three main sources of influence: Kindi (d. 874), Farabi (d.950) and the lesser known al-Sarakhsī (d. 899) who was Kindi’s most prominent student and who wrote on both theory and practice. He took Pythagoreanism from Kindi, and the intricate interrelatedness of theory and practice from Farabi and Sarakhsī. One would not expect the rejection of the Pythagorean claim about celestial music by Farabi to seal its fate once and for all. Yet it would probably have dismayed the latter to have Katib, a near contemporary, take so much of his thought about music from him, but then turn to Kindi for the music and cosmology part of his thought.

The second reason for singling out Katib for our study, is that he has given a relatively fresh and well fleshed-out statement on the subject of the meaning of music, and especially on the need for knowledge to properly enjoy music.

Our discussion in this chapter is based on the only known, unedited, manuscript found at the Topkapi Saray in Istanbul.¹ It is entitled *Kamāl adab al-ghināʾ*² (*The Perfection of Musical Knowledge*) There is a good French translation of this work by Amnon Shiloah, with introduction and footnotes, published in Paris in 1972.

Katib mentions² a previous book he had written entitled *Kitāb al-mughnī fī l-nagham wa l-ʿiqāʿ* (*What Is Sufficient on Notes and Rhythms*), but it is lost.³

¹ No.1729

² *Op. Cit.*, p. 85

³ Shiloah, *Theory*, p. 125

In their seminal two-part article on Medieval Judaeo-Arabic theory of music, Werner and Sonne divide Greek influence on Jewish and Arabic theorists into three groups: (1) The Neo-Platonists and Pythagoreans, (2) the Aristoxenians and (3) mediating between the two, followers of the Peripatetic school of Aristotle.⁴

Of the three figures from whom Katib draws his ideas Kindi belongs to the first group, while Farabi straddles the second and third. We do not know enough about Sarakhsī to place him properly. Katib himself being the eclectic that he was, would belong primarily in the first group while taking some ideas from the third.

Shiloah places Katib at the end of the tenth, the beginning of the eleventh century, on the ground that all the authors referred to by Katib lived before or up to that time. Shiloah also observes the noticeable absence of any reference to Ibn Sina who died in 1037. This could be due to the fact implied by Shiloah, namely, that because of the historical sequencing Katib could not have read Ibn Sina.

But since the exact dates for Katib are not known, he might conceivably have overlapped with Ibn Sina and possibly known his work. In such a case, the omission of any reference to the latter could be due to the fact that Katib thought of himself as working primarily within the Pythagorean tradition, and went out to Farabi for a few ideas on such topics as the relation between the practical and the theoretical sides of music, or the definition of music, or whatever. However, it would be hard to find support for this speculative possibility, and we are happy to settle for Shiloah's hypothesis.

II. *The Kindi-Farabi Influence*

We shall now briefly mention the influence of Kindi and Farabi, but will have to omit Sarakhsī. We have no extant works of the latter, and although Katib is generous in his quotes from Sarakhsī, we cannot discuss the latter's influence on Katib on the basis of an independent study of his texts.

From Kindi

Katib's Pythagorean ideas on the similarity between music, the soul and celestial music are attributed by him more immediately to Kindi. The immediate influence of Kindi can also be seen in Katib's

⁴ "The Philosophy and Theory of Music in Judaeo-Arabic Literature", *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol XVI, 1941, Part One, p. 262

discussion of the effects of music on the soul.

The similarity thesis is a familiar one by now. There is a similarity (*mushābahah*) between the harmony of music and the harmony of the soul, as well as between the harmony of human music and celestial harmony. And the meta-harmony of this *ménage à trois* is made possible by the common basis of numbers and their ratios.⁵

The doctrine of the effects of music on the soul is stated by Katib without making explicit reference to Kindi as its source, although it is known that Kindi was the first to have discussed that Greek theme. But there is nothing in Katib approaching those detailed and elaborate relationships one finds in Kindi, correlations among various modes or melodies and rhythms and various moods and character traits, as well as the correlations between all the above, on the one hand, and the biological, the calendrical, the meteorological and the astrological on the other.

From Farabi

Whereas Kindi supplied our author with specific ideas from the Pythagorean legacy, the main foundation of his work, what motivates it intellectually, is the relation between the theoretical and the practical aspects of music. And this he attributes to Farabi, but he also mentions Sarakhsī on the same subject.

It is because of the centrality of this topic in Katib's book, and the prominence of his thesis that the enjoyment of music depends on both theoretical and practical knowledge, that we have assigned him a chapter after Farabi and independent of the Islamic Pythagoreans.

What Katib wants to stress in particular is the interdependence, the complementarity of the two kinds of musical knowledge. He follows tradition in placing the theoretical on a higher pedestal than the practical, but he is strong in his insistence that neither is complete without the other. If, as he says,⁶ the practical needs the theoretical just as the body needs the soul, the clear implication is that the theoretical has no anchor without the practical.

Katib criticizes those who happen to excel in either the theoretical or the practical, and then, for that reason, proceed to promote their specialty to the exclusion of the other.⁷ The correct view, according to Katib, is the strong need of each for the other. Indeed, the perfection

⁵ *Kamāl adab al-ghināʾ*, Ch 9, pp. 58-64

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14

of music and of the musical knowledge referred to in the title of his book, consists in the union of the two kinds of knowledge. And, according to our author, his book contains all that one needs to know about these two kinds, so that the reader may dispense with most other books.⁸

This emphasis on the interdependence and complementarity of the theoretical and the practical handily connects with Katib's views about the meaning and telos of music both of which in turn have bearing on the subject of the enjoyment of music, as we shall now see.

III. *Music, Meaning and Enjoyment*

The theoretical could mean either of two things. There is the meta-level theory that Katib is engaged in when he explains about theory, practice, the nature of music and its place in human life and the total scheme of things. This is what one calls, what we have been calling, the philosophy of music.

But the kind of theoretical knowledge that he requires and which is said to be interdependent with practice is more restricted. It deals with the qualities of good composition, the formal structure of musical works, harmony and discord.⁹ And in the case of song, theory must also deal with poetry, prosody, and the matching of the melody to the poetry.¹⁰

Katib, unlike both Kindi and Farabi, was not a philosopher, and was thus content with the more immediate level theory of music. We have already seen, especially in the case of Kindi, that for the philosophic study of music the sky is the limit! Yet for the particular goal of enjoyment by listener and excelling by performer, it is understandable why the stress by Katib is on the restricted sense of "theory". One could perhaps say that a Kindian could increase his or her enjoyment by the knowledge that our earthly music imitates the celestial, but that would be a by-product rather than a goal for the philosophic search. Katib as a follower of Kindi on this part of his philosophy had that option available to him. But the option was not taken.

The theoretical knowledge chosen by Katib, directs the orientation of both performer and listener. Of this knowledge, he says it is like a king who commands, or like the role of the architect or master build-

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22

er.¹¹ Or to introduce another analogy, theoretical knowledge of music provides a map of the terrain that the 'travellers', both performer and listener, have to use if they want to know where they are going and what pleasure to derive from their 'trip'.

For the listeners this theoretical knowledge guides and equips them with what is needed to qualify as listeners, so that the right kind of pleasure is experienced and the right spiritual benefits would flow.

In the case of the performer, theoretical knowledge is necessary but not sufficient. This is where Katib outdoes himself in the wealth of detail and comprehensiveness of his discussion. The performer needs a natural disposition or natural sensitivity, plus instruction in the skills of performing the instrument, whether vocal or otherwise, as well as perseverance in practicing and mastering those skills.¹²

The performer also needs instruction in selecting a program, as well as how to behave on stage, general comportment, bad habits to avoid; singing techniques, good and bad singing practices, even such things as what foods and other conditions are helpful or detrimental to the singer's throat. Details on all these aspects of performing are amply supplied in the latter part of Katib's book. This gives the reader a clear instance of the complementarity between theory and practice for the performer.

But the practical knowledge is needed for the listener too. However, it is not the *acquisition* of the performing skills as such that is called for, but the *understanding* of them, the understanding which is a pre-condition for full enjoyment. Whereas the performer acquires the requisite skills as *khiṣāl* or traits, what is expected of the listener is *fahm* or understanding of these.¹³

The listener, then, besides needing the theoretical knowledge we described earlier, should also know what goes into the practice of performing. This extended area of knowledge *of the practice* should be common to both performer and listener. It now becomes clear, that the second half of Katib's book which contains the extended discussion of all aspects of performance, especially vocal performance, is not only a practical manual for the performer, but also an educative guide to the listener, so that *fahm* may be achieved.

All this gives more fullness to Katib's thesis that theory and practice complement one another. And whereas knowledge about the practical aspects of performing is not true theoretical knowledge, it shares

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 24 f.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 25

with it in being a kind of knowledge, and in this they can both be distinguished from what one does with one's hand, as Katib would express it.¹⁴

The Hidden and the Apparent

The theoretical knowledge that one must have is either of apparent or of hidden features of music. Examples of the apparent characteristics are: the forceful and the soft, the heavy and the light, the rough and the mellow, the warm and the cold.¹⁵ By contrast, the hidden seem to be the very characteristics that are the primary objects of theoretical knowledge, in the restricted sense: good composition, good structure, the matching of melody and poetry—presumably in both the poetic meaning and the metre.¹⁶

But more hidden than these, Katib tells us, is the meaning of the musical phrases. For one expects music to have meaning as one does of the language to which the music is set. The meaning of the music is what the composer intended to communicate, just as the poet intended to say something in his poetry.¹⁷

Yet Katib acknowledges that some melodies have no meaning, and even if they happen to be matched with poetry, that poetry itself may have little significance despite its well-constructed versification, and its eloquent language. However, if the music, and the poetry, had the meaning that is worthy of the potential of both, then there is greater profit and more impact in store for the listener.¹⁸

What Katib is developing here are two things interwoven together. In the brief space of three pages (pp. 34-36) he seems to be grafting a communication theory of music onto the traditional imitation theory, one in which music is tied to poetic meaning, but has something to 'say' in and of itself. And it seems like a version of the communication theory in which the test of what the meaning is, combines reference to the intention of the composer and reference to the character of the music itself.

The second thing that Katib is doing, is that he is preparing us for his statement about the higher goals that music, serious music, serves. This is what gives him the basis for lashing out against the populists

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33; see also pp. 164 f.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34

¹⁷ *Ibidem.*

¹⁸ *Ibidem.*

of his day who create and consume the music that has nothing more in it than superficially accessible pleasure. The subject of the two kinds of music will be taken up in the next section. Here we need to say a bit more on what we have called his communication theory of music.

Katib says that “the meaning of a melody is the goal of the composer” (*fa ma ‘na l-laḥn huwa gharad al-mulaḥḥin*)¹⁹ This is then followed by the analogy with poetry as having its own meanings invested in it by the poet. Then Katib adds the following:

Perhaps he succeeded and attained his goal, perhaps he erred, or perhaps failed (completely), or (merely) came close. It is necessary to know those goals of the melodies, of the notes and the sounds themselves. And, just as with the speaker (of a language), these must resemble (*tuḥākī*) the various states and circumstances (of the soul).²⁰

However, to determine what the particular meanings and the particular goals are one does not have to consult documents to uncover the biographical intention of the composer. The character of the music itself would reveal to the listener those meanings and those goals. How one can then decide whether the goals have been met successfully or not, is not made clear in the very brief text on which we are relying. Perhaps a clue can be seen in the following remark:

And what does have meaning, then its effects on the soul, whether in (moments of) seriousness or frivolity, are numerous and well-known.²¹

Could the effects on listeners have served him with a way of measuring success? We do not know. Katib, if he was aware of the problem of how to measure success in goal attainment, does not supply that by which we can give a confident answer.

The analogy between language and music is pressed further, and used to advance the claim that music, like language, expresses states of the soul. This is what meaning in music is, and it is what one can hear in the character of the music itself. This is brought out by Katib by a repetition of the following type of question: Do you not see that the form of articulation (*ṣūrat al-laḥd*) of the happy is different from that of the sad, of the angry different from that of the gratified?²², and so on, for a near full page of such examples. The “form of articulation

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36

²² *Ibid.*, p. 35

articulation”, as Shiloah correctly observes, is the varied intonation that re-flects the state in question. In other words, as we understand it, it is the interpretive aspect of performance that takes its cue from the pre-sumed character of the melody and or poetry and determines for the listener the expressive character of the music.

At the conclusion of the set of examples that illustrate the different forms of articulation as they vary along with their corresponding expressive state, Katib adds a sentence which is a little puzzling.

And most of these melodies were intended to tell about states (of the soul) and situations (*azmān*) so that it carries meaning.²³

Shiloah wonders what melodies are referred to by “most”, and it is certainly not obvious. He suggests that there may be some words missing such that “most of these melodies” would accordingly mean “most of the melodies of the kind which is expressive”.²⁴ But if telling about states and situations is what gives members of this class their meaning or makes them expressive, and *all* the items in his list of examples fulfill this condition, it is not clear why Katib would say “most” reflect states of the soul when all are examples of what does that.

Another possible reading, not necessarily a better one, is that the expression “most of these melodies” refers to the whole class of melodies under discussion which he is subdividing into those that have meaning and those that do not. There is a sort of a paragraph brake before this sentence under discussion that perhaps releases it from having to refer to the list of the expressive variety just concluded. Perhaps in a fresh start Katib may be returning to the main topic in this part of his book which is about the two kinds of melody, one with meaning the other without, or with not much meaning.

In this reading, “these melodies” is the class of melodies not the expressive kind alone. This would make sense of “most”, but not of “these” (*hādhihi*), and one is pushed to take “these” to refer to the whole class of melodies. But why not say “*aktharu l-alḥān*” (most melodies) instead of what he does say, namely “*aktharu hādhihi l-alḥān*” (most of these melodies)? It seems that one can either accommodate the “most” or the “these”, but not both.

We agree with Shiloah that “c’est surtout le pronom démonstratif qui est gênant”.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 36

²⁴ *La Perfection des connaissances musicales*, p.52, n.1

The Two Kinds of Music

If one were to follow the interpretation that “most melodies” (have meaning) is intended to subdivide the general class of all melodies, then the two subdivisions are: the melodies that have meaning and those that are not invested with meaning. And although the theoretical knowledge advocated by Katib targets both kinds, it is clear that there is more work for it with the group that have meaning, and especially the ones with the most hidden features to decipher.

This is a division of melodies in terms of what inheres or does not inhere in the melodies themselves. It is not to be confused with the approach of the listener who may be *qualified or not* for getting at the meaning where it exists, and therefore may or may not find it. Nor is it to be confused with the *willingness* of the listener to make the effort to ‘read’ the meaning, the question of qualification apart. These then are the two kinds of music. The music that has no meaning invested in it, no hidden things to look for, is music of immediate and easy access that contains nothing more than the apparent qualities. It may be rich and pleasing, but only in surface qualities. It is music for amusement, frivolity (*hazl*)²⁵ or play (*li‘b*)²⁶ This music pleases the senses and may induce the ecstasy of *tarab*, but does not engage the active discernment of the intellect nor does it impress on the soul the deep and lofty effects that music, serious music with meaning, can.

Some listeners, of course, look for nothing more even in music that has more. But then these listeners are just as much at fault and in bad taste as is the kind of music that has no more in it.²⁷

Clearly the perfect music is the serious (*al-jiddī*), not the populist kind. And all the preparation that the title of the book mentions, concerns serious music.

The Higher Telos of Music

The discussion of non-serious music gives Katib a chance to attack the trend of his day for easy music. This music appeals to those who do not know.²⁸ After all, says Katib, not only the ignorant among humans, but even animals delight in a beautiful sound or respond to the surface qualities of a melody, to both its tune and its rhythm. But

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 26 ff.

²⁸ Chapter 5 is devoted to the tirade against the ‘bad taste’ current in his day.

then the higher telos of music remains unfulfilled in amusement music, (referring to the music itself) or by mere hedonic surface listening (referring to the listener's approach and qualification).

For, in the end, and here the Platonic influence is in evidence, the goal of music is to affect the spirit, uplift its qualities and lead to noble deeds. The higher purpose of music is not a *ladhdhah bahīmiyyah*, or animalistic pleasure.²⁹

Some Islamic philosophers—Ibn Sina foremost among them—who emphasize pleasure as one legitimate yield from listening to music would not accept the implied dichotomy: either serious music whose function is to improve the soul, or shallow populist music that yields animalistic pleasure. For Ibn Sina the pleasures of music are many and varied. The more refined pleasures could derive from music that has nothing to do with improving the soul, or that its improving of the soul is a matter apart from the main function of music which is to give delight. Thus Katib would be thought to mistakenly tie together serious music, music that has meaning, music that improves the soul, and then throw into the dust bin one remaining kind of music that at best yields animalistic pleasure. This is music without meaning, this is populist music that pleases the *jamāhīr*.

This latter kind of pleasure of course brings to mind the well-known controversy in Islam as to whether listening to such music should be allowed. This is what will occupy us in the second part of this book

The question can be posed as a double question: the religio-ethical one of whether a true Muslim ought to be allowed to listen, and the related but independent question in social-political philosophy of whether, going beyond the moral force of religious injunction, the state or some other enforcer of the religious law, should actively block and penalize listening to music that is forbidden. Clearly, as we shall see later, the music in question is not music as such, although one can always find someone who opposes anything but the reading of the Qur'an. The *bête noire* is this misguided music that offers nothing but diversion and animalistic pleasure.

Now although Katib aligns himself with the tradition that believes that music has or should have an extra-musical moral telos, he does not advocate that any authority should regulate listening. On the ethics of listening, he simply explains, educates and admonishes.

Perhaps the best way to summarize al-Ḥasan al-Kātib's philosophy

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30

of music—the aspect reflected in the title of his work which in effect advocates the perfection of musical knowledge—is by using a distinction he makes early in that work, in his first chapter on *al-ṭarab*. Now “*al-ṭarab*” names an experience of delight, rapture, even ecstasy which is exclusive to music. It cannot be induced by massage or by winning the lottery. As a matter of fact, the word *muṭrib*, referring to the performer who induces this rapture, simply *means* musician, a vocalist to be precise.

Katib says that most people are repelled by what the learned say about music, and attribute their words to delirium or madness. The populous hold that *al-ghināʾ* (singing, music) is what enraptures (*mā aṭraba*). Katib would correct them to say: music is what enraptures *those who know*.³⁰

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.20-21

PART TWO

LISTENING TO MUSIC AND ISLAM

Mostly Prohibited

Ibn Taymiyyah

The Moderate View

Ghazali

Mostly Permitted

Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi

And Some Others

**Ibn Khaldun,
Majd al-Din al-Ghazali
Ibn Al-ʿArabi**

CHAPTER SIX

IBN TAYMIYYAH

I. Preliminary

For Ibn Taymiyyah the question of the propriety of *samāʿ*, or audition, is posed directly from the perspective of the religious law. The opening queries that create the occasion for the essay are: whether the *samāʿ* of poems set to music is part of the obediences or is forbidden. Ibn Taymiyyah says that the root of this issue is to distinguish between the *samāʿ* that profits one in religion, and the *samāʿ* which is allowed for lack of a prohibition; between the *samāʿ* of the close companions and that of the amusement seekers.¹

The point of departure in discussing this question is the fundamental belief that listening to the word of God is the foundation of religion. It is the one undisputed religious duty, and a standard by which all other listening is to be measured. A series of "Listen to My Word" quotes from the Qur'an is then marshalled to buttress this opening claim.

But listening to the Qur'an, whether engagingly recited or chanted, is a lesser issue in Islam. Still there are some who objected even to a minimal chanting, usually on the ground that melody would distract from the message of the Qur'an. Ibn Taymiyyah's stand on this is not altogether clear, as we shall see shortly.

What one wants to turn to is the question of whether one may listen to other listenables in music. And what interests us here, as we mentioned in the Introduction, is not just making a list or a table of what is forbidden, what permitted, nor merely in a recitation of what text was for, what against. All this has been done by those more knowledgeable than we are. What we want to do, is to elucidate and critically evaluate the reasoning for the permitting and the forbidding.

Like Ghazali, and all other religious Muslims, Ibn Taymiyyah says that the overriding matter in the discussion is the goal, plain and simple, of taking the road to God. But not any road will do. Ibn Taymiyyah believes that the Prophet has given us a complete religion, and

¹ *Kitāb al-samāʿ wa l-raḡḡ*, in *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil al-kubrā*, p. 295

thus the only resource for deciding the issue of *samāʿ* is whether the Law allows or forbids it. There is no road to God except following the Prophet.² And there is nothing forbidden which the Prophet has not forbidden.³

But clearly, unlike Ghazali, the mystical way and the mystical *samāʿ* in particular, are ruled out as alternatives for leading on the path to God. We shall now see the reasons behind this.

II. Rules for Judging

According to Ibn Taymiyyah, there are three rules of faith and conduct to apply in judging *samāʿ*.

The first. A given fact is that music can produce an ecstatic state. The question now is whether that in itself should be the basis for judging, or whether that ecstasy is to be subjected to judging by some other criterion. Ibn Taymiyyah believes that it would be a mistake to use the ecstasy as final arbiter. The mystic who gives up worldly desire to achieve this ecstasy, has merely traded one passion for another, a bigger one. Only God's will should be the final arbiter. Any other recourse is sinful.⁴

Presumably, the kind of faith that Ibn Taymiyyah advocates as the only correct course, could occupy a dominant and overpowering place in the psychic economy of the faithful in a way not unlike the two passions he lumps together in the rejection. Except that the phenomenology of faith would not be like that of the dismissed emotional ecstasies. Unless the faith turns into fanaticism, it is unlikely to have the same placement as the 'passion' of the ecstasies.

But dismissing the mystical musical ecstasy because it is a kind of passion does not settle the matter. For one can always distinguish between good passions and bad ones, and even if the mystic were to grant that the ecstasy produced by *samāʿ* is more like a 'passion' than, say a rational faith, it certainly is not something one helplessly submits to because of moral weakness, as when one is gripped by sexual lust and is dragged away from the path of God. The mystic diligently works to *achieve* (not suffer) that state as a result of certain religious beliefs assumed to be the right ones, and consequently the ecstasy achieved, is believed to be the right one.

² *Suʿila ʿan al-samāʿ bi l-duff wa l-shabābah*, ms. No 4807, Bibl. Ntle. (Paris), folio 57a.

³ *Ibid.*, folio 58b.

⁴ *Kitāb al-samāʿ wa l-raqs*, pp. 308-309

It looks then, as if Ibn Taymiyyah had better confront this ecstasy not on the ground of being a *passion*, like the worldly passions the mystic strives so hard to renounce, but rather as the climax of a path which is a competing alternative to the only one he is willing to allow.

The second. According to this rule, if there is ever an issue as to whether a course of action or a state is right or wrong, one must turn only to reasoning acceptable to God, namely, it should be from His Book and the life and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. Whoever does not build on these two foundations, his learning and his conduct are built on nothing.⁵

The phrase "whoever does not build on this", might suggest that one could argue by analogy (*qiyās*), using the Qur'an and the Hadith as a starting point. This would have been acceptable to Ghazali. But for Ibn Taymiyyah, only the Companions of the Prophet and their immediate successors are accepted as interpreters of the two sources. Thus "build on this" must simply have the force of "apply it as interpreted by the only accepted interpreters".

Ibn Taymiyyah has a caveat about relying on Hadith. So many defences of *samā'* have been based on what he considers false *hadiths*. Yet one gets the impression that rather than resort to a critical examination of the particular *hadiths* in question, there is a wholesale rejection of those *hadiths* that seem to favor the kind of *samā'* that he does not think should be allowed.

However, one piece of reasoning concerning an established Hadith is of special interest. Abū Bakr is said to have entered one day the house of 'Aishah during a holiday season, and heard two maids singing. This prompted him to express some disapproval. The Prophet said to let them be, for each people has its own feasts.

Pro-*samā'* advocates cite the Prophet's tolerant attitude in support of their position. But more to the point, the fact that the Prophet was himself present during the singing is cited in further support of at least this kind of *samā'*.

Ibn Taymiyyah has an interesting reply. The presence of the Prophet only meant that he *heard* (*sami'a*) the singing, but this is not a sufficient indication that he was *listening* (*istama'a*). Only hearing on purpose, namely, listening, can indicate support. And there is no proof that the Prophet sought the singing, intending to listen.⁶

Moreover, the remark that each people have their own feasts, clear-

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 309

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 301-302

ly shows, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, that even if *on that occasion* the Prophet was “listening”, it was *not his wont* to listen to singing performance. Furthermore, ‘Aishah and her young women guests were gathered playfully during the feast, and youth are allowed to be playful at feasts.⁷

The Third Rule. Look at the consequences of *samāʿ*. They are generally bad. *Ghināʾ* casts a powerful spell that lures one away from the path set by God and His Prophet, and towards what they abhor. For this reason, neither God, nor His Prophet, nor the eminent and learned forebears have either required or permitted *samāʿ*.⁸ And nothing can be forbidden, required, or allowed, unless God has ruled it so.⁹

The Bad Consequences

In what specific ways are the consequences said to be bad?

In one of the references to what his predecessors thought on this matter, Ibn Taymiyyah quotes Abū l-Faraj Ibn Al-Jawzī (d. 1200)—and the context implies approval—as saying that listening to *ghināʾ* combines two bad consequences. First, it distracts “the heart” from thinking of the greatness of God and from the duty to serve Him. Among the early writers who make a similar claim is Al-Biṣṭāmī.¹⁰

Second, *samāʿ* inclines one to seek immediate pleasures and induces one to slide onto a slope of increasing sensual appetites that culminate with sexual intercourse. Indeed, the analogy between *ghināʾ* and *zināʾ* (adultery, fornication) is explicitly made by Ibn al-Jawzī in the present context and is picked up by Ibn Taymiyyah later in his essay.¹¹ *Ghināʾ* is the pleasure of the soul (*al-rūḥ*), fornication a pleasure for the self (*al-nafs*).¹² It looks as if the distinction between soul and self here is tantamount to a distinction between the lower (sensual) and the higher (non-sensual) self.

Ibn Taymiyyah would declare them both to be pleasures in the absence of reason (*bilā ʿaql*).¹³ They are likened by Ibn Taymiyyah to the state of drunkenness: the body’s drunkenness with wine, the self’s ‘drunkenness’ with seductive images.¹⁴

A third bad consequence added by Ibn Taymiyyah, is that listening

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 302

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 313

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 310

¹⁰ *Kitāb al-taḥṣīr fī l-ʿidhāh wa l-tadhkīr*, ms No. 4807, Bibl. Nte (Paris), folio 180a

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 317

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 311

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 313

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

to *ghinā'* might make one prefer it to listening to the Qur'an. By comparison the Qur'an would seem heavy and less appealing.¹⁵ This point is made without further discussion. We shall see in our next chapter on Ghazali, a fuller and more specific analysis of why *ghinā'* is likely to appeal more than the Qur'an.

III. What Is Allowed, What Forbidden

From Ibn Taymiyyah's Essay the following categories of *samā'* are permitted. Some are mentioned in the course of an itemization of what is covered under "*ghinā'*".

1. The paradigmatic kind of *samā'* that is enjoined by the Prophet is listening to the word of God in the Qur'an. This is the foundation of faith (*aṣl al-īmān*).¹⁶ It is the one *samā'* about which there is unanimity among Muslims.

However, it is not clear from the Essay whether the *chanting* of the Qur'an is allowed, according to Ibn Taymiyyah. In his statement of the case for *samā'* as proposed by others—which he presents in order to set it up for refutation and which we will take up shortly—he mentions the argument based on the Ḥadith: "Embellish the Qur'an with your voices". Yet in his point by point refutation of his opponents' case, the argument allowing *samā'* to the chanting of the Qur'an just drops out from sight.

We have found nothing explicit in the published version of this Essay about the recitation of the Qur'an as being cantillation. We have not seen the manuscript of the Essay that leads Shiloah to claim that the reading in question is a cantillation requiring a beautiful voice.¹⁷ And in the manuscript of his work on whether it is permitted to listen to the frame drum and the flute, there is no reference to this issue.¹⁸

2. Pilgrimage-*ghinā'* in which the poems describe the Ka'ba, Zamzam and other related features of that religious duty.¹⁹

3. Chanting of poems that incite to invasion.²⁰ One assumes that this would be in a religious cause. Ghazali was careful to say "justi-

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 298; see also pp. 295-299

¹⁷ Shiloah, *The Theory*, p. 223

¹⁸ *Su'ila 'an al-samā' bi l-duff wa l-shabābah*, ms No 4807, Bibl. Ntle, folios 56b-58b

¹⁹ *Kitāb al-samā' wa l-raḡṣ*, p. 309

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 309

fied" invasion.

4. Chanting of poems to cheer those engaged in duels.²¹ (One presumes that these are, in some sense, legitimate duels.)

5. Chanting of poems about courage and good character. Supposedly this was what the maidens sang at 'Aishah's house.²²

6. Singing at weddings and other joyous occasions. This includes the permission for women to strike tambourines on such occasions.²³ In the summary of the arguments made by his opponents, Ibn Taymiyyah mentions the fact that the Prophet had allowed singing at weddings and that he called it "*lahw*" (amusement).²⁴ This is not refuted later, giving implicit support for his more explicit statement.

7. There is a similar implicit endorsement, this time of *al-ḥudā'*, the chanting of the caravan leader. In the summarized case *for ghinā'*, it is said that the Prophet allowed it.²⁵ In the refutation of the various *pro* arguments, this point is not taken up, and therefore not challenged.

What Is Forbidden

The opening distinction in Ibn Taymiyyah's Essay between the *samā'* that benefits religion—although some of the items in the above list of the first category such as *ḥudā'* are strictly not religion connected—and the *samā'*^c that is merely for amusement and passing time, leads him now to round up the offending varieties of *samā'*^c and by the same token of the musics themselves.

1. Heading the list, and most frequently mentioned among what is typically forbidden to listen to, are the pair of practices *al-makā' wa al-taṣḍiyah*.²⁶ The first of these, *al-makā'*, is a whistling that is produced by placing a certain configuration of one's fingers in the mouth and blowing. On the other hand, *al-taṣḍiyah* is essentially percussive, and it consists of clapping—which one assumes is rhythmic clapping. In some passages the percussive use of tambourine (*al-duff*) and rod (*al-qaḍīb*) is mentioned along with the clapping.²⁷ Listening to such things is the *samā'*^c of the polytheists.²⁸

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 310

²² *Ibid.*, p. 319

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 301

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 315

²⁵ *Ibidem.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 299

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 301

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 299. Plato mentions clapping and whistling as instances of vulgar audience behavior (Laws III, 700).

It is curious that on the performing side, women may do the clapping but not men. "Clapping is for women, praising Allah is for men." ("*innaṣṣa l-taṣṣīq li l-nisā' wa l-tasbīḥ li l-rijāl*").²⁹ It is most unlikely that Ibn Taymiyyah wants the reader to conclude that praising Allah is not for women.

In all aspects of performance it is crossing the line that is reprehensible: men doing womanly things—these are the effeminates (*al-mukhannathūn*)—and women doing manly things. An example is often given of women dressing like men and men dressing like women. The Prophet allowed *women* to strike the tambourine at weddings and other joyous occasions, and, consequently, this would not be permitted for men to do.

A puzzle remains. If women are permitted to *do* clapping at weddings, would everyone have to leave the room if *listening* to clapping is forbidden? And what of those women listening to their own clapping? Perhaps the answer is that clapping at weddings is submerged in, and is in the service of a legitimate kind of celebration. Whereas special gatherings at which the whistling and clapping are more of the heart of the occasion, and where the occasion is for nothing other than frivolity and amusement—this is what is forbidden to the faithful.

2. Listening to the instruments of amusement (*ālāt al-lahw*) is also forbidden. The instruments mentioned are tambourines (*dufuf*), cymbals (*ṣunūj*), reed flute (*al-shabābah*), and string instruments (*al-awtār*).³⁰ However, this point is stated indirectly. For, he says, that from a remark by the Prophet in which he commented favorably on the beautiful voice, people have transferred this to apply to several items listed, all presumed to be forbidden. And the list includes the case of the instruments of amusement. Presumably, such *samā'* contributes to waywardness.

3. There is a similar indirect mention of listening to singing performed by women and the beardless (*al-murdān*), that is, young boys.³¹ They just appear in that list of activities to which people wrongly extend the Prophet's favorable remark about the beautiful voice. The sensual temptations of listening to women and young boys are more directly and explicitly stated by Ghazali, as we shall see.

4. In that same list is the case of listening to songs in which the poems mention (or describe, or extol the beauties of) certain parts of

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 301

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 319

³¹ *Ibidem.*

the body such as the mouth, the black hair and black eyes, the redness of the cheeks, and the female breasts, among other things. It sounds as if this item evokes in words what the previous point presented by sight. In each case the danger is in the sensual temptations that can overwhelm and overcome.

5. One further category of song that, with the previous kind, constitutes the bulk of what one may call the secular song that is typical of amusement occasions. This is the song about love, and lovers, about separation and anxiety, and drawing close.³² The Prophet is said to have even forbidden the *mu'adhdhin* in his call to prayer from using the language of love and longing,³³ possibly because if the object of love is left unspecified, the listener can slip into this vagueness some unworthy secular object, and we are back in the corrupting sensual world which the Devil uses to drive us away from God.

IV. *The Refutation of the Case for Samā'*

Let us now discuss Ibn Taymiyyah's statement of the case for *samā'*, as others advance it, and his (nearly) point by point reply to the various pro-arguments. Some of these arguments in favor of *samā'* have been used by Ghazali, as we shall see in the next chapter.

From Ibn Taymiyyah's text we have been able to identify fifteen considerations or arguments that have been advanced by various other people in favor of *samā'*. Unfortunately, both the statement of these and Ibn Taymiyyah's replies are very brief.

In certain cases there are variants of the same type of argument, and his rebuttal is of the type rather than of each variant. For example, one argument mentions the fact that the Prophet heard so and so recite a poem, and he approved either explicitly or implicitly. Another refers to the Prophet listening to his Companions reciting poetry, and the same positive response from the Prophet. In the section where Ibn Taymiyyah replies, these arguments which are differentiated by those who propose them are treated generically by our author.

1. The argument: *Ghin ā'* has a highly pleasing and calming effect. Particular mention is made of its tranquilizing effect on babies and the reinforcing effect chanting has on camels in hard desert journeys.³⁴

The reply is in two parts. (a) Ibn Taymiyyah says that from the mere fact that something is pleasing or agreeable to the senses, one can-

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 329

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 314

not infer and invoke any of the five categories in Islamic jurisprudence, namely, that the thing is forbidden, or abhorrent, or permitted, or obligatory, or desirable. And as to whether, specifically, one can conclude that it is permissible from the fact that it is pleasant, Ibn Taymiyyah says that one might as well argue that fornication should be permitted because it is pleasing to the senses.³⁵

Ghazali would not quarrel with this reply, especially the part that says that the pleasantness qua pleasantness is no reason for *forbidding*. Ghazali is not one who would argue that being pleasant is a sufficient reason for *permitting*; certainly not for *obligating*. His view is that if something, such as the beautiful voice, is pleasing, and other things are equal, there is no reason for not permitting. In other words that makes it *desirable*. This would rule out Ibn Taymiyyah's rebuttal based on the analogy with fornication, for here other things are not equal, and fornication would be condemned for reasons unrelated to the matter of its pleasantness.

(b) The second part of Ibn Taymiyyah's reply specifically concerns the tranquilizing effect on babies and camels. Here he asks a rhetorical question: does the fact that *ghinā'* tranquilizes babies and eases a camel's journey constitute a sufficient basis for the Law to either permit or forbid *ghinā'* in a general and unqualified way? ³⁶ Presumably the intelligent answer is in the negative. While his reply is sound, it would be difficult to find someone who has proposed the argument in just the blanket form he sets up for his refutation.

2. The second pro-argument for *samā'* is this: a beautiful voice is a gift from God, and the ugly voice is condemned in the Qur'an.³⁷

To the first half of the argument, Ibn Taymiyyah's reply, by analogy, takes the fact that God has also given us good looks. But does it mean that we are allowed to leer unreservedly at those with good looks? And as to God's condemnation of the ugly voice, should one on the basis of that permit all manner of poems and songs played with whatever instrument? ³⁸

In other words, can one possibly permit the whole range of what *ghinā'* covers just because the ugly voice (usually of the donkey) is condemned? What is emerging is a logical strategy that will be used again and again: it is a questioning of the inference to the whole range covered by *ghinā'*, from the seeming innocence of but a partial tributary.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 317

³⁶ *Ibidem.*

³⁷ *Sūrah XXXI*, 18

³⁸ *Kitāb al-samā' wa l-raḡṡ*, p. 318

3. The argument: people in Paradise savour delights in a luxuriant garden, and this includes pleasant *samāʿ*, so how could it be forbidden (here) if it is allowed there.³⁹

Ibn Taymiyyah replies that this is like arguing that people may wear silk here, and men may adorn themselves with silver and gold because these exist there; or that one may drink wine in this life because wine is allowed in Paradise.⁴⁰

This reply which is in the form of a rhetorical question seems to be saying that the assumptions behind life in Paradise are not the same as those for the present life. In this life we prove ourselves; in the other we are rewarded. Thus the rules of the game are different in the two circumstances, and one cannot infer from one set-up to the other.

Ibn Taymiyyah continues his discussion by considering an opponent's rejoinder: things like wine are explicitly prohibited, but there is no explicit prohibition of *samāʿ*.

To this Ibn Taymiyyah correctly replies that this is no longer an argument for doing 'here' what is done 'there', but rather an unrelated rejoinder that simply raises the question of whether *samāʿ* is explicitly forbidden. And this is too broad a question, according to our author. Which *samāʿ* are we talking about?, he asks.

He invokes the five juridical categories of judgement: the forbidden, the abhorrant, the allowed, the obligatory and the desirable.⁴¹ Without applying each of these systematically to the various listenable, Ibn Taymiyyah's argument continues in a more general way. The point he wants to argue for, and Ghazali would agree here, is that from the moral-legal perspective, *samāʿ* is not a homogeneous class, anymore than 'listening to words' is. Or one might add by analogy: how silly it would be to ask, 'Are acts morally acceptable?'. 'Which acts are we talking about?' is the proper response.

From this comment about the mistaken level of generality to focus on, and the implication that some *samāʿ* is permitted while other *samāʿ* is not—by-passing for now the subtle distinctions of the five juridical categories—it follows that it would be erroneous to infer from the fact that a positive view is taken of some *samāʿ*, say listening to the chanting of the Qurʾān, that therefore all *samāʿ* is to be favorably viewed.

This would be as unwarranted an inference as saying that all speech

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 314

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 318

⁴¹ *Ibidem.*

should be permitted since the Ḥadith is speech.⁴² Or the move from the approval of listening to the beautiful voice to the approval of all the following: the singing of effeminate, or singing with the instruments of amusement, or the singing of words that mention evocative parts of the body, or verses about passionate longing and heartbreaking separation, or any *samāʿ* that induces drunken-like states. How can these harmful things be condoned? And what physician would prescribe that which is injurious to the health of patients?⁴³

4. The argument in favor of *samāʿ* that cites the example of ‘Aishah listening to her two young maidens when Abū Bakr dropped in, is, to Ibn Taymiyyah’s amazement, one of the major arguments used by the pro-camp. But note the peculiarities of the case. The two maidens were still young (“pre-puberty”), and were with their mistress ‘Aishah, a young woman, on a day of feasting and celebration, and were reciting verses of Arab poets that describe courage in war and other noble moral virtues. All this prompts Ibn Taymiyyah to ask translating literally: But “where is this from the other?”⁴⁴

This is followed by a revealing and more specific question. “Does this (case of ‘Aishah) justify all they do with *samāʿ* today?” This expresses the concern of someone who is alarmed by the excesses of *samāʿ* that were rampant in his time. One recalls the attacks of Katib against the bad taste he claimed was so widespread in his time, although in his case that was more aesthetic than moral indignation. But one also refers to Ibn Ṭūlūn’s attributing the opposition to music as in part due to its abuse in the popular secular places of business and pleasure, the taverns, the markets, the carnivals.⁴⁵

Ibn Taymiyyah’s alarm about the excesses in musical performance could also explain why his general tone is more negative than that of Ghazali, when practice by practice, the two would agree on most of what is to be permitted or prohibited. The notable exception, of course is Ghazali’s advocacy of mystical *samāʿ* and Ibn Taymiyyah’s strong rejection of it.

5. The argument: it is the consensus of the learned that listening to the pleasant songs of birds should be permitted. In that case would not the pleasing human *ghināʾ* be at least equally permitted; and it would be more worthy.

In his reply Ibn Taymiyyah questions how one can compare liste-

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 319

⁴³ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁵ Shiloah, *The Theory*, p.224

ning to effeminate singers and instruments of amusement and the poetry of sensual allure, to listening to bird song. This would be like saying that selling (or commerce) is like usury.⁴⁶

The pro-argument under consideration overlooks the crucial disanalogy between bird and human song. One important difference pertaining to human song that it often urges one towards union with some loved one, but if that love is illicit, then the singing that urges it should be forbidden. The seductiveness and temptation of human love song has no counterpart in the appeal of song birds to human listeners. Thus, in Ibn Taymiyyah's view, the argument rests on an invalid analogy.

In elaborating on the statement of the above pro-argument, Ibn Taymiyyah gives it a variant form and builds into it an analogical move of a different sort. We will come across this argument in Ghazali. It is an argument based on the replication of the natural pleasure enjoyed by each of our senses. Just as it is natural for each of the sense of taste and of sight to have its (morally neutral) pleasures, the same is true of hearing, and the pleasures of listening to the pleasant voice, be that of bird or human being. There are such natural pleasures in the domain of each one of our senses.⁴⁷

Ibn Taymiyyah does not in fact reply to this form of the analogical argument that he has stated. But from his reply to the bird-song argument and to some of the others as well, it should be clear that no argument will be admitted that seeks to justify *ghinā'* wholesale on the basis of some seemingly innocent point of departure. What is at the root of Ibn Taymiyyah's stand is the following logical principle: so long as *some* instances of *ghinā'* are morally objectionable, or, more to the point, objectionable from the viewpoint of Islamic Law as he interprets it, no simple move from "some" to "all" could possibly be accepted.

Ghazali's way of making the same point, as we shall see, is that the question of whether *ghinā'*, or music in general, is to be permitted, prohibited, etc., depends on the particular kind of *ghinā'*, or the particular circumstances under which it is performed, including consideration of the relevant consequences. Thus some *ghinā'* is acceptable, some not.

Yet the tone of Ibn Taymiyyah, which seems to us to be almost always in the negative, makes him commit in spirit, if not always in

⁴⁶ *Kitāb al-samā'*, p. 318

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 317

strict logic, the same kind of error that he accuses the pro-*samāʿ* advocates of committing. Unlike Ghazali and Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi who happily and positively come out in favor of some *samāʿ* while clearly opposing others, one has the impression that Ibn Taymiyyah is happier with a wholesale condemnation, while, perhaps grudgingly, admitting in small print this or that kind of *samāʿ*, for example, during feasts etc. which are explicitly allowed by the Qurʾan and the Hadiths that therefore are authoritative.

But by limiting himself exclusively to the explicitness, more or less, of these two sources, without allowing reasoning from analogy or *qiyās*, he has, from the perspective of Ghazali and Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, limited the horizon of what can be heard by the faithful Muslim.

The two most important exclusions are, first, the serious, though secular, high art music that the major writers discussed in this book have advocated. The second kind of listening excluded is religious mystical music which is called *samāʿ* in the strict sense. Ibn Taymiyyah seems to feel obligated as an eminent theologian and Muslim legalist to watch out for all those who are 'soft' on *samāʿ*, as they say in contemporary political jargon, lest the camel's foot in the tent should lead to the admission of the whole beast.

6. Then there are a few variants of the pro-argument based on a precedent in word or deed, set by some person or persons of accepted religious standing in Islam. This kind of argument, actually used by both sides in the dispute, offers as first premise the fact that so and so is reliably reported to have either willingly heard or commented favorably on some recitation, or explicitly permitted this kind of recitation. The "so and so" is either the Prophet, or his Companions, or some other eminent and accepted learned authority. Or, and above all, Allah through His Word.

As to the specific type of performance mentioned in Ibn Taymiyyah's summary of the pro-arguments, most are instances of the recitation of poetry, and one would assume this to be chanted recitation. In one instance, however, it is reported that angels and prophets (in the plural) attended *samāʿ* sessions of clapping and whistling because of their interest in it and their love of it.⁴⁸

In the case of reports of eminent Muslims having listened to poetry, recited or sung, the reply is as follows. In these types of reports one has to be careful to distinguish between the true and the false. Even some well known writers such as Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, al-

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 323 f.

Ghazali, °Abd al-Qādir and others whose books quote sayings favorable to *samā°*, even these people are not immune from errors in this regard, namely from including unauthenticated sayings.

In his refutation of the claim that angels and prophets attended and liked whistling and clapping performances, Ibn Taymiyyah invokes a counter report, with the assumption that this one is true. It is said that the *shayṭān* (the devil) appeared before God and asked for a house. Allah replied: your house is the bath place. Shayṭān: give me a qur°an. Allah: your qur°an is poetry. Shayṭān: Give me a *mu°dhdhin* (the one who calls to prayer). Allah: your *mu°adhdhin* is the reed (*al-mizmār*). Then Allah addressed the Shaytan saying: “arouse whom-ever you can with your voice....” Ibn Taymiyyah translates “voice” immediately to mean the voice of *ghinā°*.⁴⁹ In other words, *ghinā°* is the voice of the devil which he uses to lure people away from the path of God.

That Ibn Taymiyyah seems to be content with such negative conclusions about *ghinā°*, wholesale, confirms our interpretation of his wanting to be hard (not soft) on *ghinā°*, to make the condemnation in the headlines, so to speak, while admitting in small print certain kinds (at joyous occasions and such). It is what we had in mind when we said earlier that Ibn Taymiyyah commits the fallacy of generalization in his negative judgement that he accuses his opponents of committing in their positive case for *samā°*. This may be rooted in his distinctive fervor for protecting the Faith from what he would consider the dangers of the moderate and liberal positions.

One specific “so and so was in favor” argument is of special interest, for it presents Ibn Taymiyyah with a dilemma for his authoritative-precedence epistemology. It is claimed that “ °Abdullāh Ibn °Umar and °Abdullāh Ibn Ja°far and the people of Madina allowed it (*ghinā°*, *samā°*), and that so and so (*kadhā wa kadhā*), friend of Allah attended and listened to it. So those who forbid it are slandering these leaders and notables.”⁵⁰ This incidentally, is an argument strategy used frequently, by Ghazali’s brother, Majd al-Dīn, as we shall see in our final chapter.

Ibn Taymiyyah’s initial response does not appeal to his previous kind of rebuttal that “some reports are false”. Rather he acknowledges that the friends of God may at times err, and that there is nothing uncommon for some friends of God to disclaim an error made by other

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 324

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 316

friends of God.⁵¹

How does one resolve a disagreement between two claims when each side says that their case rests on some authoritative source. If both claimants are, as in this case, said to be friends of God, neither one can be disqualified on grounds of fraudulence. If their sources are authenticated, then the higher source overrules. This means one side is better anchored in the Qur'an and or Ḥadith. But neither of these two sources contains a blanket condemnation of either *ghinā'* or *samā'*.

Furthermore, we are not helped by the fact that Ibn Taymiyyah does not tell us what the "it" refers to in the dispute. In his text, when a particular kind of *samā'* is not specified, are we to understand then that the pronoun refers to *samā'* simpliciter?

At the end of his refutation, when he takes the further step and falsifies the claim we are now discussing, namely, that certain friends of God attended 'it' and heard 'it'. He then adds: "How preposterous that any of the early friends of Allah would have attended this *samā'*."⁵² Once again an ambiguity, of "this" this time, leaves uncertain whether the reference is to *samā'* of a certain kind, such as whistling and clapping, or to some *samā'* occasion in question regardless of what went on.

However, to Ibn Taymiyyah's credit, his reliance on the epistemology of authoritative text is still critically alert and somewhat sophisticated. One needs only to read what is perhaps the earliest text on the subject, *Dhamm al-malāhī* by Ibn Abī l-Dunyā (d. 894) to appreciate this fact.⁵³ For the latter is just a straightforward string of references to this or that authoritative text or source, with no sense of a need to do anything more beyond the citation. At least Ibn Taymiyyah takes on those who produce texts and arguments that go the other way.

V. Dance

The title of Ibn Taymiyyah's essay is *Kitāb al-samā' wa l-raqṣ* (*The Book of Audition and Dance*). We need to say something of his discussion of dance, even though the text on this is very brief—a total of one page—because the dance presents some interesting questions about definition, as well as raising similar issues to *samā'*.

The first thing said about dance is that God did not command it,

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 320

⁵² *Ibidem.*

⁵³ Edited and translated by J. Robson in *Tracts on Listening to Music*

nor did the Prophet nor any of the leaders of the faith. On the more directly negative side, Ibn Taymiyyah quotes the Qur'anic verse: "Walk not on the earth exultantly,"⁵⁴ and the verse: "Be modest in thy walk".⁵⁵ The assumption of the relevance of these verses presumes that dance is a form of (exultant) walking. This is how it violates the injunction to moderate one's walking motion as well as one's general comportment. There is a conceptual issue raised here which deserves some comment.

It is apparent that Ibn Taymiyyah believes that the dance is exultant behavior and is unbecoming to a faithful Muslim. For Allah commanded the comportment of quiet prayer and dignified bearing. Thus if some were to give themselves to the playful skipping and leaping, knowing what behavior that involves, then this would be like someone who drinks knowing the drunken consequence.⁵⁶

There are two questions here. One is whether the verse about not walking exultantly is correctly interpreted as applying to the dance, and this is the question of whether dance is a form of walking. The other question is whether all dance is nothing but exultant behavior, nothing but playful skipping and leaping.

One can argue that dancing is not a kind of walking, anymore than running is, unless "walking" is used here as the general term for all locomotive uses of one's legs. And while this may take care of running, it does not quite apply to dance for that is not a form of locomotion, at least not in intent, for the essential purpose of the dance is not to cross distance. Some steps in dancing may require some locomotion to execute, but it is not for that reason that they are done. Those steps may land the dancer a little distance beyond, but it would be the leap not the covering of distance that is the point.

Kinds of foot movements may thus be distinguished by the intent behind them. Even in the case of two movements which may be photographically similar in all important respects, the different intent will mark them as different kinds of foot movement.

One way of telling whether someone is dancing or merely dodging bullets fired at the level of the feet, or perhaps stone-hopping to cross a shallow river, is in the purposive answer to the question: why are you hopping like that? One answer is: "I am dancing". The other is "I am dodging bullets", or, "I want to get to the other side". Thus walk-

⁵⁴ *Sūrah 17:37 and 31:18*

⁵⁵ *Sūrah 31:19*

⁵⁶ *Kitāb al-samā' wa l-raḡṣ*, p. 314

ing and dancing would be quite different in the spirit and intent with which they are done, and cannot be assimilated to the same subclass of bodily movement, especially that some dance, or moments of dance, may not involve the use of the feet at all, beyond standing on them.

Dancing as a purposeful activity can be further differentiated from leg twitching or other reflex movement, using the same purposive question. In the case of reflex movement the answer to the question of why one is moving is that the leg or foot is moving, but one is not moving it. Thus while dancing and walking both involve purposive foot movements, unlike reflex foot movement or leg twitching, they differ essentially in their intent. Dancing is certainly not movement of the sort of which walking to a destination is the archtypical example.

The other question is whether the dance can be ruled out by the general injunction about observing a moderate and dignified comportment. The answer would vary with the kind of dance in question, as well as the purpose behind each kind. There is popular dance which is solely for play and amusement and which is usually exultant. But there is nothing conceptual against it being otherwise. There is religious dance, often symbolic, as practiced by the sufis which is meant to help the seeker in getting closer to God. And then there is high-art dance as was practiced in higher social circles,⁵⁷ which may have been light-spirited at times, but the fact that it was not merely frivolous should put it in a different light. And from a conceptual point of view there is no reason to exclude the possibility of a dance, of whatever kind, which has slow, dignified or even sad movements. So by summarily placing the entire genre of dance as some kind of exultant or frenetic activity with no redeeming features, Ibn Taymiyyah is treating the dance, as he did with *ghināʾ*, exclusively in terms of its non-religious, or even irreligious, forms.

At any rate, what is clear, for Ibn Taymiyyah, in the case of both *raqṣ* and *ghināʾ*, may be summarized by the simple rule for all human action: Do not do what places you outside the orbit of God, of His word, and the example and word of the Prophet. These, and only these, ultimately set the Straightforward Path for humans to follow. And according to him, dance, as he circumscribed it, and most kinds of *ghināʾ*, and the *samāʿ* to them, do not only fall outside the godly orbit, but by their potency push one outside the orbit and off the Path,

⁵⁷ See Amnon Shiloah, "Réflexions sur la danse artistique musulmane au Moyen âge", *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, V^e année, no. 4 (1962), pp. 463-474.

both in allegiances and in action, thus morally derailing the course of one's life. It is an either/or situation. There is no both/and.

An Epilogue on the Dance

One does expect the views taken on the dance to be split in the same way they are about *samā'* and *ghinā'*. A selection of some of the more interesting and representative points on each side, by some writers other than Ibn Taymiyyah, will round out our discussion. An exhaustive survey is not our object.

Wholesale condemnations come in two forms. The most global is a condemnation of all frivolous play or *lahw*. In this category is included, simpliciter, dance, *ghinā'*, *samā'*, clapping, together with such non-musical activities as games, gambling, drinking wine and fornication. Even the practice of keeping pigeons to fly from rooftops in the hope of gaining other pigeons flying by, is said to have been forbidden by 'Uthmān Ibn 'Afnān, the third Caliph, on two counts. It is a form of gambling, and then, in some cases, men use the practice as an excuse to go on those rooftops and peer at women in neighboring quarters.⁵⁸

The global condemners of music usually deny that music has any benefits, or even declare it to be destructive. This is sometimes stated in terms of what the devil is trying to do through all of these, and that is to lure humans away from God. Al-Ṭurtūshī (d. 1126) is a good example of such a person.⁵⁹ Ibn Jamā'ah (d. 1388) classifies the dance along with all earthly pleasures, and these lead the religious person to error and perdition.⁶⁰

The less global attacks simply target the group of musical activities; dance is then included with *ghinā'* or *samā'* and clapping. Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn al-Ḥajj, may be cited here, among others.⁶¹ But not to be outdone by the global condemners, Ibn al-Jawzī charges that melody excites the listeners and alienates them from God, instead of helping to draw them closer to God, as is claimed by the sufis. Thus "it is improper and unlawful to dance like beasts and applaud like women." As a matter of fact the title of his book is *Talbīs Iblīs* (*The Devil's Delusion*).⁶²

⁵⁸ James Robson, *Tracts on Listening to Music*, Introduction, p. 12, n. 5

⁵⁹ See Shiloah *The Theory*, p. 351

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 162

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 164 and 177, respectively

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 164

When the focus is on dance, per se: it is compared to the Golden Calf dance of the atheists by al-Ṭurtūshī.⁶³ It is denounced by al-Hujwīrī as part of the class of all foot-play which, he says, is disapproved of by both law and reason, no matter who engages in it.⁶⁴ We recall Ibn Taymiyyah referring to the relevant verse in the Qurʾān about exultant foot movement. Al-Hujwīrī's adding the clause about whom-ever engages in it is probably to counter reports that some significant so and so did it. Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī questions the genuineness of the trance claimed by sufis through the dance. He rather thinks these trances to be false imitations of the real thing.⁶⁵

Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī is a more sympathetic writer on both *raqṣ* (dance) and *ghināʾ*, although he, like the others, is critical insofar as any of these activities has an element of frivolous play in it. His more specific objections pertain to minor aspects of the dance. The kind of movement in (much of) dance is unbecoming to the comportment of the elders (*al-mashāyikh*). This is less sweeping than Ibn Taymiyyah's stand. Furthermore, al-Suhrawardī objects to the kind of dance with sensual amorous gestures which he declares to be the heart of depravity. Of this it was said "*al-raqṣ naqṣ*" (a rhymed version of "dance is a defect").⁶⁶ However, he is tolerant of dance movements in playing with family and especially children. This is permitted under the heading: refreshing the heart.⁶⁷

One very interesting aspect of al-Suhrawardī's thought on this is his view of the importance of intention in moral evaluation. He quotes the known proverb, *inna l-aʿmāla bi l-niyyāt*: acts are (judged) by their intentions. Generally, in whatever we do, the lower self can impinge on the soul and take away whatever merit there is in the action itself. One can get close to God by good works, but these are worthless if the *niyyah* is not there.⁶⁸ Al-Sarrāj (d. 988) had already stated that listening is permitted so long as there is behind it no bad purposes or corrupt will.⁶⁹

Applying this to the dance and *samāʿ*: if these are done for the purpose of frivolous play or "with the licentious self", or if the movements of the dance are done in strained artificiality, without the right spirit, then that is reprehensible. One is left to conclude that if these are

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 351

⁶⁴ *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, p. 416

⁶⁵ *Qūt al-qulūb*; see Shiloah *The Theory*, p. 273

⁶⁶ *ʿAwārif al-maʿārif*, p. 166

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 168

⁶⁹ *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, p. 347

done in the right spirit then that is permitted. There is an exception. This is the case of actions which are forbidden as to their type with no further ado. An example given by Al-Suhrawardī is listening in circumstances which are inherently compromising, such as listening to a woman or a beardless one (a young boy) sing. The clearest illustration of his tolerant attitude on account of having the right spirit is in the following: if you listen to a bird and contemplate God's agency, how can this be bad. The same is true of the human voice.⁷⁰

The advocates of the dance, and in this case it is mystical dance, follow two lines of argument. The first is similar to the argument in favor of mystical *samāʿ*^c, namely, it helps the seeker in the search for God. This is a 'factual' or experiential claim by those who say they are in a position to know, and it runs head on against what the condemners and the detractors say.

The other strategy is to interpret the particulars of the sufi dancing in a symbolic way. This permits the advocate to give the deepest meaning to the movements of the dance, and to rescue it from any possible association with the 'usual' dance that belongs to the world of frivolous play. We shall encounter these ideas in some of the chapters that follow.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 161-168

CHAPTER SEVEN

GHAZALI

I. *Preliminary*

It would be possible to summarize Ghazali's main thesis about the permissibility of *samāʿ*, or musical audition, by the following hypothetical example. If one were to ask Ghazali whether the use of one's feet is permissible or forbidden, he would answer: if you use your feet to walk to the mosque for prayer or to visit a friend, then that is permissible, but if you kick someone for no reason or with intent to harm, that is a forbidden use of the feet.

The answer is simple and sensible, yet not extraordinary. It is also a simplistic version of Ghazali's view, as we shall see. In any case, the focus of this chapter is not just on a statement of his main thesis, but rather on the details and the subtlety of some of his arguments.

Now for a few preliminary remarks.

Notice, first, that Ghazali approaches the ethico-religious issue of music insofar as it concerns the listener or 'consumer' of music. As a matter of fact, this is not untypical of the approach of those others who have discussed this issue in Islam. The question of permission or prohibition does not usually concern the activity of the composer or performer, or, in the case of improvised music, the performer-as-composer. Nor is the concern, in the case of song, with the poet as author of the words. In other words, Ghazali's discussion concerns the conduct of the individual believer. He is doing religious ethics not political philosophy. He is not closing dance halls or cabarets; rather he is more likely telling the believer to avoid them.

There are in the literature, to be sure, condemnations of both the listening and the performing. We mention a few examples: Al-Bisṭāmī puts it in this pithy way: "In listenig to the repugnant you are an accomplice to the sayer".¹ Ibn Abī al-Dunyā in his *Dhamm al-Malāhī* quotes al-Shaʿbī as saying that Allah curses both the singer and the one sung to.² On the other hand, al-Haythamī (d. 1567) "In the course of condemning musical instruments boasts that he destroyed instru-

¹ *Kitāb al-tabṣīr fī l-ʿiḍāh wa l-tadhkīr*, ms No. 4807, Bibl. Ntle (Paris), folio 181b

² Robson, *Op. cit.*, p.47

ments and brought musicians to trial”.³

The second general remark is that Ghazali uses the term “*ghināʾ*” as the obvious word for song, but there are passages in his chapter on *samāʿ* in the *Ihyāʾ*⁴ in which what is referred to is not vocal music. For instance, *ghināʾ* is said to include sounds emitted by dead matter (the case of musical instruments) as well as by throats of non-human animals and birds. So although it is vocal music that concerns Ghazali most of all, it is not only that. One could justifiably use the term *ghināʾ* in a generic way of music and musical sound as such.

The question of whether to listen to music, and which music, has been amply discussed before Ghazali. That is why our author devotes the early section of his chapter on *samāʿ* to a brief examination of the views of some of the jurists who came before him. Finding no unanimity among those writers before him, but rather a wide spectrum of views, each contradicting the other, Ghazali concludes that to rely on the method of *taqlīd*, namely, the unquestioning acceptance of opinions from the past, can only result in perplexity and confusion. Accordingly, he proposes to seek the truth independently, and to discuss the considerations that might be advanced for permitting and forbidding.

II. The Elements of *Ghināʾ*

Ghazali’s epistemology here is fairly straightforward. Characteristically, he says that the truth in these matters cannot be reached by reason alone. One must also be guided by, and not go against the *sharīʿah* or Islamic Law. One thus relies on Text (*naṣṣ*) and *qiyās*. By “Text”, Ghazali says he means “what the Prophet has disclosed in word and deed”.⁵ This would ordinarily mean simply the Ḥadīth. But the context and the discussion that follows clearly refer to the Qurʾān as well. For that is part of what the Prophet disclosed in word.

Qiyās is reasoning which, by analogy, extends the application of Text. Yet although Ghazali defines *qiyās* in this way, the unfolding of his reasoning on the subject touches on Text rather infrequently. Much of what he offers seems to be reasoning of the usual sort.

The heart of Ghazali’s defense of *samāʿ* begins with a statement of the elements of *ghināʾ*. These are discussed under four headings.

(1) A pleasing voice or *ṣawt* (2) Structural or rhythmic balance (*al-*

³ Shiloah, *The Theory*, p. 129

⁴ Part II, Book 8, p. 239

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 238

ghināʾ al-mawzūn) (3) The meaning of the poetic text, and (4) The effects of music on the listener, or as Ghazali puts it, the effect on the heart and limbs. These are discussed, systematically, one by one.

1. *The Pleasant Voice*. Both Text and *qiyās* support listening to the pleasant voice *qua* pleasant. Holy text praises the beautiful voice, including the voice that chants the Qurʾan, and it condemns the ugly voice or sound, for example, the sound of the donkey braying.⁶

As to arguments, there are essentially two. First, a general argument that relies on the fact that in the natural scheme of things, each of our cognitive faculties, the five senses and reason, has its appropriate positive and negative values. For reason, knowledge and understanding are the positive values; ignorance and stupidity are the negative ones. In the case of eyesight: greenery, running water, a beautiful face, beautiful colors, versus their opposites. The sweet versus the bitter, for taste. The soft and smooth as against the rough and wrinkled, for touch; the smell of perfumes versus that of rotten odors. And then, similarly in the case of hearing: the sound of the nightingale or of the woodwinds are pleasant, but the sound of the donkey not so.⁷

This bifurcation in the very nature of things as they act on us, gives to each of the perceptive-cognitive faculties a certain legitimacy in its appreciation of the positive in its domain and its distaste for the negative. Thus for the ear, it is perfectly proper for it to enjoy the pleasant sounds, insofar as they are pleasant.⁸ In other words, with nothing else entering into the picture.

This last clause, “with nothing else entering into the picture”, is an important hedge. For as we have seen in our last chapter, Ibn Taymiyyah argues against using the acceptance of the beautiful voice as a premise from which to move to the conclusion that *ghināʾ* as a whole is to be permitted. It is clear that Ghazali who argues from that premise does not reach the incautious conclusion inveighed against by Ibn Taymiyyah.

The second argument is contained in a brief sentence which translates as follows.

If it were possible to say that (the beautiful voice) is permitted only on condition that it is in the Qurʾan, then listening to the voice of the nightingale would have to be forbidden, for that is not in the Qurʾan.⁹

⁶ *Sūrah XXXI*, 18

⁷ *Iḥyāʾ*, II, 8, p. 239. Cf. al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, p. 344

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

I understand this to say that if one were to permit only what occurs (and is permitted) in the Qurʾan, then there is the odd consequence of having to forbid listening to the voice of the nightingale. And this is odd, if only because the voice of the nightingale is pleasant, and, as we have seen, Text praises the pleasant voice. One could add that it is odd also because the nightingale is not a responsible agent. Thus it makes no sense to forbid the voice of the nightingale or those of other birds.

Nor would it make sense to forbid *listening* to the voice of the nightingale. Since ordinarily that voice comes into our ears uninvited, and in those cases we cannot be said to choose to listen, unless of course we *seek* it in the woods.

2. *The Mawzūn*. Besides being pleasant sound, *ghināʾ* is also structurally or rhythmically balanced (*mawzūn*). That these first two elements of *ghināʾ* are distinct, according to Ghazali, is shown by the fact that there are sounds with structure but which are not pleasant, the braying of the donkey, for example. And there are pleasant sounds without rhythmic balance or structure, presumably the singing of a single note by a pleasant voice.

Ghazali defends listening to *al-ghināʾ al-mawzūn* in two steps. In the first he lists the sources of *mawzūn* sounds. These could be emitted by inanimate body or by the throat of an animal or human. Ghazali then adds that none of these sounds are ever forbidden just for being *mawzūnah*.

As with the feature of pleasantness, Ghazali wants to argue that the character of being *mawzūn*, *in itself*, namely as (pleasant and) *mawzūn*, is permitted for listening. It is certain properties which are *accidental* to these that are the basis for forbidding listening, as we shall see.

3. *Meaning*. To the well-balanced and pleasant elements of *ghināʾ* must be added linguistic meaning, that is, poetry. Since this can issue exclusively from human throats, we are clearly in the domain of song, of *ghināʾ* in the strict sense.

Now *ghināʾ* cannot be forbidden merely because it has meaning, just as it cannot be forbidden merely because it is pleasant and well-balanced. Ghazali here quotes al-Shāfiʿī who said that poetry is words, what is good is good, what is bad is bad. Ghazali adds that if a poem has no bad in it, how can the whole be condemned. This finesse the condemnation of listening to poetry as such. And if the whole poem as to its meaning has nothing bad in it, how can it turn bad for being set to a well-balanced and pleasant melody sung by a beautiful

voice? ¹⁰

Moreover, Ghazali says that the weight of Text is in favor, for both the Prophet and °Aishah are said to have either recited or endorsed the reciting of poetry, while none of the Companions of the Prophet spoke against it. ¹¹

4. *The Effect of Music.* This fourth aspect of *ghinā'*, vocal or non-vocal, is clearly not a *component* of *ghinā'* like voice, rhythmic balance and poetry, since it is presented in terms of the *effect* of music on the listener. But it is nonetheless a function of the character of the music itself. It is the effect-side of the coin, the other side of which is the expressive character of the music itself. This merits fuller discussion.

III. *The Effects of Music*

Depending on its particular expressive character, music can affect the listener in different ways. And here Ghazali clearly cannot be restricting himself to vocal music in which the meaning of the words is the crucial factor. For, his first examples are of the effect of music in tranquilizing a baby in its crib, or the *ḥudā'*, the chanting of a caravan leader to prod a camel and help it bear its burden in long distance travel. Granted that both instances are ones in which there is a vocal melody, but the words—unless there is humming— can only be experienced by the child and the camel in terms of their surface sounds and their rhythm, not their meaning.

Music can gladden, sadden, put one to sleep, amuse, entrance. It can also lead to the movement of parts of the body or of the entire body, in dance, or in other action, such as inducing people to make the pilgrimage, or inciting a group to invasion. Music can stir one to long for union with one's beloved, and above all, for a religious mystic like Ghazali, the right kind of music under the right circumstances can stir the seeker to long for and love God, the most beautiful and most worthy object of love.

Two general points must be made about Ghazali's view of the effect of music.

First. In many cases Ghazali holds the inherited view that the expressive character of the music is a virtually sufficient condition for producing the effect on the human or animal listener. Thus certain music can tranquilize the perturbed, gladden the gloomy, and so on.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 240-242

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 241-242

No requirement of any co-condition of preparedness or affinity in the listener is presupposed. On the contrary, if someone is sad and music cheers that person up, the jovial character of the music is at the opposite end of the scale from the mood of the listener. We have already alluded to this type of effect-by-the-opposite—the water on fire, so to speak—or the *allopathic Katharsis* which Werner and Sonne attribute to the Pythagoreans.¹²

While accepting this inherited view of the virtual sufficiency of the character of the music in affecting the listener for many cases, Ghazali does not generalize this form of the causal nexus to all cases. And the reason may be something as follows. Our author is motivated, in part, to write his chapter on *samāʿ* in order to build towards the highest calling that music can have, namely, to lead the seeker to the love of and nearness to God. In this context no external factor, music included, no matter what its character, can be sufficient to lead to this goal. The other necessary condition that must be fulfilled is that the seeker has to ready himself for it. Thus the nature of the causal nexus has to be one of co-sufficiency, or affinity with the state of the mystic's heart.

In the manner characteristic of Ghazali's clear writing, analogies are put to good use. Thus: a vessel can only leak what it contains; or, quoting a certain Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (d. 820): you cannot put in the heart what is not there.¹³ This clearly runs counter to the causal assumption made when talking about music tranquilizing the perturbed or cheering the depressed.

Moreover, this veering towards the co-sufficiency or affinity view of the causal relation is required by the basic principle of Ghazali's whole mystical philosophy. For the first step in the mystical journey, the *sine qua non*, is the transformation of the mystic's heart or self, the polishing of the mirror. Only then might the disclosures 'descend' and overwhelm the seeker. It is the condition of tuning the receiver to the right wave length, the co-condition for the final attainment. In this framework the *samāʿ* is by itself not a sufficient cause. Listening to music can only stir into dominance the longing and the love for which the seeker has already prepared himself.

Perhaps what underlies Ghazali's view here is an important conviction on what it is that can have religious merit. It must be a state earned by the seeker's own effort. If the seeker was merely caused to love God or long for union with Him by some external factor such as the taking of a drug in some Huxlean experiment, it is hard to see how

¹² *Op. Cit.*, p.274. See *supra*, p. 43

¹³ *Ihyāʾ*, II, 8 p. 243

the person in question can get religious credit, or be admitted to Paradise. For that depends on what one does with oneself. Might as well get hit by a falling branch and experience trance-like longings, or, even better: after leading a wicked life one just buys a ticket to a *dhikr* 'concert', and gets turned on to God, much the way listening to a jovial piece of music might relieve depression. There is much suspicion in the literature about the possibility of fake non-genuine trances that have no religious import.

The second general point to make about the effect of music, this time with regard to the issue of permitting or forbidding *samāʿ*, is that when dealing with the category of effect, Ghazali's reasoning naturally turns consequentialist. The view simply stated is this. If the effects are good then that *samāʿ* is permitted or recommended. If the effects are bad, then that *samāʿ* is forbidden. More precisely, if *samāʿ* leads to God then it is recommended. If it leads to a wayward or wicked life, it is forbidden. But we must clearly get a bit more sophisticated and detailed about this, for Ghazali himself does.

Since most of the discussion so far has made reference to the *pro*-side of *samāʿ*, let us now turn to the circumstances of listening to music that make it forbidden.

IV. *Forbidden Audition*

Note first that in the few kinds of cases when Ghazali is opposed to *samāʿ* it is not on the grounds that it could or does give pleasure. For only wordly pleasures that serve the cause of the devil should be forbidden, not pleasure as such. Otherwise, says Ghazali, one would have to say no to all pleasures.¹⁴ In his most general statement of the consequentialist principle as applied to *samāʿ* he says that listening to what stirs up the devil in our hearts is forbidden, while listening to what stirs up any or all anti-devil feelings is permissible or recommended. Examples he gives of the anti-*shaytān* feelings are: the love of God, joy on holidays, or on the occasion of the birth of a child, or of a boy's circumcision, or the return of the absent. Such consequences are good, and the listening that leads to them is *ḥalāl*.

The most notorious of the wicked or pro-*shaytān* feelings in connection with music derive from the overwhelming sway of sexual desire and the drinking of wine. And the two have been frequently coupled together in the literature. One of the most striking of the state-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 239

ments making this linkage is one by al-Tha^cālībī (d. 1038) who declares in wholesale fashion, "The mothers of all worldly pleasures are: food, drink, sex and listening to music."¹⁵

Both wine and (some) music lead away with the same decisive force. *Samā^c* to a seductress or a seductive song, or *samā^c* at occasions at which there is consumption of wine are prime offenders. As a matter of fact, the *ṭarab*, that ecstatic delight that results from listening to music, has often been compared to the state of drunkenness.

But it is not the fact that these simply fill one with what is *other than* God. For, looking for one's lost keys, or struggling with a door that is stuck would distract also, if distraction were the sole consideration. Rather it is the combination of the power of sexual desire and wine to overcome all that is in our volitional arsenal *and* to drag one into a life-world which inherently rejects the godly and the world of the spirit. This is the classic antagonism in religious discourse between what is of this world and of the other, and a testimony to the potent lure of what is this-worldly.

In the full working of his consequentialist position Ghazali's reasoning is rather subtle and sensitive to the details of the particular case. Here are two striking examples to start with.

The first concerns drinking wine which is forbidden by Islamic Law. Yet, Ghazali says, if someone is choking on his food, and the only available liquid to use for the rescue is wine, then it should be permissible to give that person wine. Of course one can say here that it is the taking of wine *qua* liquid that is condoned not the particular liquid that it is. Nevertheless, the example is striking given the rather common alternative attitude that would rigidly and in reflex manner condemn regardless of circumstance.

The second example is about the reading of the Qur^ʿan, a most laudable religious duty. Yet, Ghazali, taking his cue from a Qur^ʿanic verse that makes the same point, says, suppose that the reading of the Qur^ʿan were to turn a listener away from God, then listening to that reading would be forbidden.¹⁶

However Ghazali does not rest with a straightforward version of direct consequentialism, in which X leads to Y in a simple and direct fashion. He cites three kinds of cases that seem like variants of direct consequentialism.

¹⁵ Shiloah *The Theory*, p. 347

¹⁶ *Ihyā^ʿ*, p. 251.

1. *The Relation of Complementarity.* In some contexts of listening and of listening to certain kinds of music, the occasion calls for, or is enhanced and made more complete by drinking wine.¹⁷ This is much like the smoker whose after dinner coffee is said to be enhanced by a few puffs. Now since drinking wine is forbidden, that particular sort of listening occasion becomes derivatively forbidden.

2. *The Suggestive Relation.* Given the first point that some *samāʿ* occasions and wine drinking are mutually enhancing, these types of occasions tend to bring to mind and create the desire for the drinking of wine on all such occasions.¹⁸ Just as the sight of wine paraphernalia brings to mind the possibility of actual drinking, so would certain kinds of gatherings and their music call to mind and create a desire for the wine drinking that enhances and completes the pleasure of listening. Of course the last two arguments can also be used against participating in those types of gatherings themselves even when there is no music.

It is tempting to suggest here, but also for the entire history of the controversy in Islam, that one could handle this sort of danger by urging or even training all participants to exercise self-control. For one can say that in this context yielding is a deficit of resistance. If wine is the immediate culprit why not caution against drinking wine. This would then not deprive people of listening to certain music that gives them pleasure. After all one can always order a non-alcoholic beverage.

Moreover, in the tradition of mystical *samāʿ* there is an accepted principle, namely, of the differential readiness of people for music. Thus only the advanced seeker can take the experience of listening to the music. Although some like Ibn al-ʿArabi maintain that at that point the advanced does not need the music. However, the novice should either be forbidden from listening or listen in the presence of a teacher. At any rate what is implicit in the logic of this thinking, is that whether to permit or to forbid depends in part on the inner preparedness or the inner resources of the listener in question. This avoids a blanket positive or negative judgement. And in a way this would be consonant with Ghazali's attitude towards mystical *samāʿ*.

However, on the subject of secular, sensual, wine-inviting music occasions, there is another and more decisive consideration that ruins the chances of finessing the prohibition by a combination of soft drink

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 240

¹⁸ *Ibidem.*

and self control.

3. *The Associative-Symbolic Relation.* Suppose—and this is Ghazali's example—you go to where 'bad' people go, sit around a table and order the *sāqī* to pour a drink in the very containers in which wine is usually served. However, in this case the drink is one that is usually prescribed for health: *sakanjabīn* or oxymel, a mixture of vinegar and honey. This participation would be condemned on the grounds of association with a type of activity, or as we might now say, a lifestyle, which, when for real, is condemnable. So if one goes through even the outer motions of what bad people (*ahl al-fisq*) do or partake of, or in Ghazali's words, what is their emblem (*shi'ār*), then this becomes condemnable.¹⁹ One supposes that a *bona fide* saint would be condemned for having punk hair!

The ruling on this type of case seems stricter than on the case of the wine that saves one from choking to death. Perhaps the difference in the present case is that, beyond the stigma of symbolically associating with wayward ways, there is the underlying fear that the contaminated paraphernalia of the corrupt is contagious and would translate into real corruption. Thus the condemnation here is a prophylactic measure, and the consequence indirect.

That Ghazali's ruling is still a form of paternalism is not surprising. For religious ethics tends to be paternalistic insofar as the religious concern is not just about social policy, but for individual righteousness. And the ultimate source for the religio-ethical injunctions is a divine being whose business is precisely to protect us from ourselves, and whose status gives Him the right to do so.

One contemporary example of *secular* paternalism that Ghazali would endorse, is the recent outcry in the United States about the lyrics of certain popular songs that endorse violence among other things. The demand is for these to be banned in order to protect the children. On his part, Ghazali says that if the lyrics of certain songs are either obscene, foul or defamatory, then these songs should be condemned, and one should not be allowed to listen whether with or without melody, although he adds that defaming the wicked is permitted.²⁰

¹⁹ *Ibidem.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 249

V. *Ghināʾ* Versus The Qurʾan

Some writers have acknowledged with obvious concern that some features of poetry and song make them more competitively appealing than the Qurʾan. One such example is typical: Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 988) says that those who prefer to listen to poetry and to song, do so because they find them more accessible than the Qurʾan.²¹

Ghazali gets into a full discussion of the issue, and gives seven reasons as to why *ghināʾ* is more likely to be attractive, and more stirring to the average person than the Qurʾan.

(1) Much of the Qurʾan cannot establish an easy rapport or affinity with the soul of the listener, for it discusses inheritance, divorce, usury and other 'heavy' or obscure subjects. By contrast, the poet expresses what is already in the hearts of listeners.

(2) The Qurʾan is memorized early in life, and it is ever familiar throughout the rest of one's life. Repetition tends to diminish its impact. Whereas the variety in wording and form of expression in poems, even when the subjects are the same, makes poems-songs more effective. Every novelty has its pleasure and everything unexpected has its jolt. But the Qurʾan is perfect and complete. No one can add to it; there is no chance for novelty and no surprises that can grip one.

We wonder whether Ghazali is talking about a real long time of being familiar with the Qurʾan, for one would have thought that new understandings, new interpretations and applications could supply the element of desirable freshness.

(3) Poetry is metered (*mawzūn*), and of course melodies add their own rhythm. One proof of our fondness for this is that when the meter or the rhythm is wrecked, this disturbs our heart. It is surprising that Ghazali of all people should underestimate the rhythm and 'music' found in the language of the Qurʾan. Perhaps his point is that much of the prose in the Qurʾan, as miraculous as it may be, is still, in terms of meter and rhythm, not quite what one can get in poetry.

(4) In the recitation of poetry or in its singing there are very effective techniques of performing which are not permitted in reading the Qurʾan, even when it is cantillated. Examples he gives of this are the shortening the long, lengthening the short, halting in the middle of a word, cutting and linking, and undoubtedly other techniques in song.

²¹ *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, p. 357

(5) In the case of song one can enhance the effectiveness of the vocal part by adding certain instruments. Some of these have been banned because of their association with frivolous amusement and even depravity. Their added effectiveness cannot be denied, however, and yet they obviously cannot accompany Qur'anic readings nor cantillation.

(6) Here is a very interesting point. If what a singer is performing does not sit well with the listener, the latter can ask for something else. The listener is the 'consumer', and thus has the upper hand. By contrast a listener to the Qur'an stands to it in a different relationship. The listener is like the sick in need of a cure. Being pleased or not with a particular verse is beside the point, and in any case, it is not the patient who decides what medicine to take.

Furthermore, the listener is 'king' in another side of this, namely, he or she has the freedom in interpreting the meaning of the poetry. One is not bound to the intention of the author in the way one is with the Qur'an. One can only interpret God's words in the way God intended them.

(7) According to this point which Ghazali attributes to Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, the Qur'an as the Word of God, His Speech, is a part of God, and its full meaning is not always fathomable. We would be struck with wonder and awe if even a tiny part of it is revealed to us. Whereas the songs and their poetry are readily accessible due to their ready affinity with our nature.²²

These seven points show what kind of persons 'we' all are. They are realistic. They are perceptive. But that merely underscores the difficult task for anyone to become the kind of true religious person that Ghazali thinks one should be.

But the points are interesting in another and important way. For they make one wonder how much of the antagonism against singing and music is due to this competitive edge that these have over the Holy Text. One does often need to resort to the goading, or even coercive artillery of the rhetoric of condemnation—for example, the concepts of hell or sin—in order to redress the balance of power in favor of the religious way.

But let us leave this matter where it is, and turn now to a closer look at Ghazali's consequentialism.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 262-265, for the seven points

VI. Refinements of Consequentialism

Ghazali's consequentialism commits him to examine the relevant details of each case. For, as he says, often what is *permitted* at the more general level may be forbidden at the specific level, by the accidents to the type of act that is in question. And the same logic applies to what is *forbidden* at the more general level.²³

Examples of this abound throughout his chapter on *samāʿ*. We have referred to some already; here are a few more. Eating honey is *ḥalāl*, but feeding it to the feverish is *ḥarām*, since it might harm them. Selling, as a type of activity, is permitted, but not on Fridays during the call to prayer. Al-Dikdikī (d. 1775) would have added the case of sexual intercourse which is expected within marriage but forbidden outside it.²⁴

Even *lahw* (amusement) the black sheep of traditional Law and a special culprit in Islamic discussions on music, and the *bāṭil*, or acts that are idle or trivial, are as such not forbidden. A little innocent amusement, according to Ghazali, refreshes those of us who need it—prophets and other holy men have no such need²⁵—and helps us to go back to the serious tasks of life in earnest. But an entire life of amusement is a different matter. That is condemned.

The same would be true of the *bāṭil*. Ghazali says that if someone wants to touch his head a hundred times for no special reason, that is all right. That in itself would be pointless, but this is not to say that it is forbidden. However, it is not recommended that one make a life of it.²⁶ Thus the doing of certain acts which may be permitted in themselves and in episodic fashion, are not recommended when they become habitual life-long pursuits or a way of life.

It is interesting that in his eagerness to cohere with the Law on drinking, he is less tolerant of the practice than with some other activities, and does not give it the benefit of the difference between the little and the much, even as he admits that wine in moderation is not intoxicating.

Applying all this to *samāʿ* reveals the same absence of an absolute or blanket rule. Singing that urges the faithful to make the pilgrimage

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 251-252

²⁴ See Shiloah, *The Theory*, p. 87

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 253

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 250. See also *Ibid.*, p. 252

is as such recommended. But in a particular case, if you urge someone whose parents have forbidden him from leaving the house, or if the road to be taken is unsafe, then this is no longer acceptable. Or, to refer to a case of indirect consequences, if the urger has a beautiful voice and the melody of the song is well-turned, and the rhythm of the drums then adds its magic, all this is increasingly effective, and is permitted. But then it can all be disqualified if one uses the strings and wind instruments associated with the wayward.²⁷

Much of these same examples and points reappear when a different subdivision of consequences is offered, one that cuts across the previous categories. The circumstances that are relevant to a particular moral situation are now divided into those that pertain to the performer, or to the instruments used, or to the poetry, or to the listener. A brief word about each will round out this part of our discussion.

1. *As to Performer.* A negative judgement is passed if the singer is a woman or a boy who are such that they would pose a temptation even when they are not singing. For then, if seeing by itself entices, hearing added to that magnifies the enticement.

The class of women who are initial candidates for such lure does not include blood relatives or the master's own slave girl. Censure is thus directed at listening to the type of woman referred to simply as *al-ajnabiyyah* (the foreign one). Even here, much depends on the age and condition of the male listener,²⁸ as we shall see shortly.

2. *As to Instrument.* Making use of the associative-symbolic principle discussed earlier, Ghazali forbids listening to music that includes certain wind and string instruments associated with effeminate or bi-sexual people, or of habitual drinkers.²⁹

3. *As to the Poetry of Songs.* If the poetry is obscene, foul or defamatory, then listening to the song of which that poetry is an essential ingredient would be forbidden.³⁰ (Unless, of course, the performer is an opera singer who will not articulate clearly anyway!)

4. *As to the Listener.* This is where Ghazali implicitly acknowledges (again) the fact that the effect of music is a function of not only what the music and the circumstances of its performance are, but also certain conditions pertaining to the listener. We first met this in our discussion of the effects of mystical *samāʿ*, where we noted Ghazali's emphasis on the state of readiness of the listener as a mystical seeker.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 243

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 248-249

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 249

³⁰ *Ibidem.*

Now in this secular kind of listening that he has in mind, the danger of listening to an enticing woman or attractive boy, differentially depends on conditions pertaining to the listener. Thus a youth is more vulnerable to the power of *al-shahwah*, or desire, than an older man. The sway of the devil over a young man's heart is more likely to be stirred, even when the words describe only a woman's cheek or temple.³¹

Can one infer from this that if older men, a hardier and more resistant breed, to borrow the language of horticulture, were to listen to what fells the youth, that Ghazali would turn his eyes the other way and let them be. There is nothing textual to support this. Although one supposes that in these types of cases, the flexibility shown when there was high religious value at stake is put out of gear here. Why should Ghazali accommodate even the hardier men to achieve pleasure that usually stands at the opposite end from the world of the spirit?

5. *As to Habituation of Innocent Pleasures.* Another consideration brought out by Ghazali concerns activities which in themselves may be morally neutral, but become reprehensible when they turn habitual and take over a life. Ordinary people who are not God-oriented will find that the habitual pursuit of 'little' activities which in themselves are not bad, become so when those activities turn into a way of life.³²

For example, activities such as playing chess, or engaging in some other amusement to lighten the heart, are not bad in themselves, according to Ghazali, but would become so if they take over and dominate one's life. Not every good is good when there is much of it, and thus not everything that is permitted would be permitted if there is much of it.³³ One assumes that Ghazali is not talking here about the love of God!

We have come across this point earlier in this chapter. Its function here is to say what it does about the whole range of activities that are subsumed under *lahw* or amusement, and to include those instances of listening to music which are innocent in themselves, such as listening to a woman relative or one's slave girl when all the other relevant matters—poem, instruments, the setting, and so on—are acceptable.

The Problem of Relativizing

This relativization to circumstances leads Ghazali to consider an objection which he then proceeds to answer.

³¹ *Ibidem.*

³² *Ibid.*, p. 250

³³ *Ibidem.*

The objection is this: How can you (Ghazali) say that something is permitted or forbidden in some cases but not in others? More precisely: How can you say first that a certain type of act, for example, eating honey, or listening to a *mawzūn* song, is, simply, permitted, another type of act forbidden, but then refuse to give a simple yes or no answer at the more specific level? Instead, you say that at the level of a particular case there is no blanket or simple answer, but that it all depends on what the relevant specifics of the case are.

In reply, Ghazali distinguishes between what pertains to an act as to its essence, that is, insofar as it is the kind of act that it is, on the one hand, and what pertains to the act done on a specific occasion, when all the morally relevant circumstances are taken into account. For one can say in advance, as it were, that a certain type of act is permitted or forbidden because it is that kind of act.³⁴ In this way, we suppose, one is restating the general values and rules of conduct of one's moral heritage.

But for a consequentialist like Ghazali, a moral agent does not perform an act at this general level. And a type of act performed under one set of morally relevant circumstances is not the same act as the same type of act performed under a different set of circumstances, including a different set of consequences. Listening to a song by a female cousin who is properly dressed is a different moral situation from listening to that same song when the singer is a partially exposed seductive stranger. Thus there is nothing odd about permitting in general the listening to a song, other relevant things being equal, while refusing to rule in advance about a specific instance of listening to that song until one knows what those other relevant things are.

Modern ethical writers in Western philosophy might sum up such reasoning by saying that certain types of acts are *prima facie* right or wrong. The specifics of a particular case will then help one to decide whether an act in question should be judged as actually right or wrong in that particular case.

VII

In summary. Listening to a beautiful voice that sings a well-balanced melody enhanced by morally acceptable poetry and the right instruments, is as such permitted. And if the music contributes to the domi-

³⁴ *Ibidem.*

nance of the love of God in a prepared heart, then that music has attained its highest calling. On the other hand, listening to song performed by a seductress, or on other amusement occasions that invite the drinking of wine, or that use instruments associated with the wayward and their life-style, that is forbidden.

CHAPTER EIGHT
IBN ʿABD RABBIHĪ

I. *The Question of Religious Authority*

Unlike Ibn Taymiyyah, and to some extent unlike Ghazali, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi does not turn to authoritative religious sources to answer the question of the permissibility of *ghināʾ*.¹ This is not to say that he never quotes such sources, for he does in a few instances. Rather, while being aware and appreciative of the stand taken by religious authorities, the main thrust of his case hardly relies on what these sources said, *as an argument* for or against music. His case virtually rests on the positive effects of *ghināʾ*. In this respect he is closer to Ghazali than to Ibn Taymiyyah.

But Ghazali differs in two ways. First, Ghazali takes the authority of the Qurʾan and Ḥadith as a point of departure and then adds the layer of evidence from the good effects of music. Second, one specific and all-important effect of *ghināʾ* for Ghazali, is the positive role it plays in the attainment of the mystical goal. This is absent in both Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi and Ibn Taymiyyah.

The difference between the latter two on this point is that while Ibn Taymiyyah vehemently attacks sufi *samāʿ*, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi does not bring up the subject. He died in 940 A.D., one hundred and seventy one years before Ghazali did. At that time sufi *samāʿ* would not have gathered sufficient steam. It is unlikely that he would have been acquainted with *Qūt al Qul ūb* of al-Makki who died in 996. He was one of the early sufi authorities who wrote on *samāʿ*.

In the opening of Chapter One of his *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd* Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi says:

And we shall now speak, with the help and permission of Allah, on the science of melodies (*ʿilm al-alḥān*), and the disagreement of people about it; those who abhor it, and for what reason they do, those who approve it, and for what reason they do.¹

In this our literal translation, the attitudes of abhorrence and approval must refer to the music, the *alḥān*, (the melodies) not to the *ʿilm*, or science that studies them.

¹ *Op. Cit.*, p. 3

Then when he comes to the matter of the disagreements

People disagree about (the propriety) of *ghināʾ*, and most of the people of al-Ḥijāz permit it, while most of the people of al-ʿIrāq abhor it.²

As he proceeds to fulfill his promisory note, his tone has the character of a survey. He presents the views of both protagonists and opponents, and when they quote religious sources in support of their case, the tone of his prose continues to be that of a somewhat distant reporter. One does not find Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi engaging either side in a critical discussion over their use of religious authority as argument.

Here is a sample of the narrative tone from the summary of the case of the proponents which begins

And one argument of those who permit it is that it originates in poetry which the Prophet commanded, incited to it, and urged his Companions to it..³

Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi notes this and passes on, unlike Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1234) who refers to the Ḥadīth that the Prophet listened to poetry, but argues that one cannot infer from this that the Prophet approved of *ghināʾ*, for poetry and *ghināʾ* are not the same. While neither poetry nor prose are music, yet poetry, like music and unlike prose, has rhyme, and thus a certain rhythm. But this by itself does not make it music. Poetry becomes song only by the addition of melody.⁴

There is another example of Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi's narrative tone in reporting the use of religious sources by others:

And they derive argument for the permissibility of singing and its approval, from the saying of the Prophet to ʿAishah, "Did you lead the young maid to her husband?" She said, Yes. "And did you send with her someone who could sing?" She said, No. "Or, did you not know that the Anṣār are people who delight in the *ghazal* (love song)?"⁵

Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi gives no direct indication that *he* wants to argue from religious authority, even though the proponents are defending the very *pro*-position that he takes.

² *Ibid.*, p. 6. We agree with Farmer's translation. See *Music: The Priceless Jewel*, a translation of al-ʿIqd al-farīd, p. 9.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴ *Awārif al-maʿārif*, p. 175. and in the Paris ms No. 6758, folio 63 b. This ms seems to have been mistakenly identified as the *Akhlāq al-ṣūfiyyah* of Ibn al-ʿArabi (See Shiloah *The Theory of Music in Arabic Writings*, pp. 151-152). We have found that the music portions of the Paris ms under that number are identical with those in the ʿAwārif text.

⁵ *Al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, p. 7. The Anṣār are the followers of Muḥammad in Medina who gave him refuge when he emigrated to that city from Mecca.

When it comes to what the opponents of *ghinā'* say, there is an instance in which the Qur'an is quoted in support of that position and on which Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi participates with his own critical remarks. But these touch on a matter of textual interpretation and not on the epistemological use of a quote from a religious source as an argument.

And one of the arguments of those who dislike *ghinā'* is: they say that it fills the heart with aversion and the mind with agitation; it weakens one's forbearance, incites to frivolous play (*lahw*) and ecstatic delight (*ṭarab*), and, basically, is vanity. This is their interpretation of the saying of Allah, the Great and Glorious: "Some men there are who buy diverting talk to lead astray from the way of God without knowledge, and to take it in mockery".⁶

Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi's reply is that this verse is wrongly said to apply to *ghinā'*. Rather, it was aimed at those who used to purchase books of ancient tales which they preferred over the Qur'an. He then adds "but he who listens to singing does not take the verses of Allah for mockery".⁷ Al-Ghazali's brother, Majd al-Dīn, interprets this differently. He says the verse applies to singing that turns one away from God, and not to all singing.⁸

It is curious that Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi by-passes the substance of the argument in the quotation which concerns the bad effects of *ghinā'*, and picks on the one aspect of textual interpretation. Perhaps, one assumes, that the good effects of music that his case rests on and that he has already expounded in his book, would have constituted the rejection of the claim about the bad effects.

Thus it seems as if Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi wanted to take his own statement of the permissibility of *ghinā'* away from the battlefield that revolves around what religious authorities have said. The central question for him seems not to be: 'Is *ghinā'* lawful?', but 'Does it have good effects?'. This, of course, does not prevent him from quoting what religious authorities have said.

One instance in which he himself does quote the Qur'an and the Prophet, possibly intending this to help him in his own case, is in the chapter on the beautiful voice. The verse "He adds to creation what He pleases."⁹, according to one commentator,¹⁰ he tells us, refers to the

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9. The quoted verse is Sūrah XXXI, 6 (Arberry translation).

⁷ *Al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, p. 9

⁸ *Bawāriq al-Ilmāʿ*, p.148

⁹ Sūrah XXXV, 1

¹⁰ Farmer says "Two of the commentators who held this view were Ibn al-ʿAbbās (d. 687/8) and Al-Zubri (d. 742)", *A History of Arabian Music*, p. 6, n. 2

to the beautiful voice (as that which is added). However, the text is ambiguous as to whether the addition is more creatures, or features added to the creatures He has created. Arberry's translation seems to favor the former, Pickthall's the latter.

Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi then proceeds to quote the Prophet who according to tradition said to Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī, when the beauty of his voice pleased him: "You have been given a reed-pipe (*mizmār*) from the *mazāmīr* of David". Here the ambiguity of the plural form, *mazāmīr*, covers both the *mizmār* as reed-pipe and the *mazmūr* as psalm, and thus could refer to either.

While this is not a defense of singing as such, for there is the beautiful speaking voice, there is no reason, other things being equal, why if the beauty of the speaking voice is praised, the same praise could not extend equally to singing insofar as the voice in the performance is beautiful.

We have maintained that Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, in his own statement of the case for *ghināʾ*, virtually stays away from relying on the use of religious sources as argument, but he does at one point make a religious point of sorts in his defense.

In the list of the good consequences of *ghināʾ*, we are told

And one can attain the blessings of this world and the next through beautiful melodies.... and man will recall the bliss of the Kingdom of Heaven and image it in his mind."¹¹

This brief and almost incidental reference to a religious consequence from listening to *ghināʾ* is a far cry from the role given to *samāʿ* in sufism. However, it is a nod in the direction of an appreciation of the full potential of music as a serious art and not just as the *lahw* it is summarily described by the critics, who then for that reason become its critics.

The epistemology of Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi shies from the use of religious sources in building his case, but this is not an indication of a totally secularistic or even a worldly hedonistic and sensual view of *ghināʾ* of the sort that has provoked the opposition of many religious muslim figures.

II. The Case for Music

Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi's case for music reads more like a eulogy than an argued defense. In this respect he comes through not as a philosopher

¹¹ *Al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, p. 5

and theologian like Ghazali, or a theologian like Ibn Tamiyyah. He is considered a master of *belles lettres* and a noble savants.¹²

He commences his book with the following

And we hated for this book of ours, after we dealt with the different branches of.... literature, wisdom, anecdotes and proverbs, that it should neglect this art which is the goal of listening, the pasture of the soul, the spring of the heart, the arena of love, the solace of the dejected, the friend of the lonely, the provision of the traveller, due to the great impact of the beautiful voice on the heart and its domination of the entire soul.¹³

This Islamic “An die Musik”¹⁴ sets the tone for much of what follows. For example, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi’s own comment of the beautiful voice is in the same vein:

did Allah ever create anything with greater effect on hearts or a more dominant impact on minds than the beautiful voice.¹⁵

To this is immediately added the disarming phrase: “especially if it is from a beautiful face”.

However, one does find some argument in his text, and this is of two kinds. The first, in supporting the pro-*ghinā*’ position, the defense consists mostly of listing the good effects of music. The second is to neutralize some of the points made against it. We shall discuss each in turn.

The Direct Arguments

From the beauty of the voice as such, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi turns to what, according to him, the “people of medicine” have claimed:

.... that the beautiful voice infiltrates the body and flows in the veins. In consequence, the blood becomes pure through it, and the heart delights in it, the soul is cheered by it, the limbs are agitated and the movements nimble (because of it). For that reason they disliked that the child should be put to sleep after crying unless it be danced and sung to.¹⁶

Although this is explicitly about ‘the beautiful voice’, it would be difficult here to separate the effects of the beauty of the voice as such from the effects of the music sung and the character of the melodies. So one presumes that what is said about the voice applies to the music performed as well.

¹² R.A. Nicholson *A Literary History of the Arabs*, pp. 347 and 420.

¹³ *Al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, p. 3

¹⁴ A famous song by Schubert set to a poem by Franz von Schober, in praise of music.

¹⁵ *Al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, p. 5

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4

There are, however, other passages that speak directly about music and its effects, and the pleasures derived from it.

According to the philosophers, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi says, *al-nagham* (tone), has an excellence that it retains from speech, but which the tongue is unable to extract, whereas nature expresses it in melodies. And it is the repeated phrases of the music rather than the repeated poetical meter which causes the soul to fall in love with it.¹⁷

The Platonic view about the effect of music on moral character is repeated by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi in the following specific ways.

Melodies induce noble traits of character such as performing kindness and observing family ties, and defending one's honor.¹⁸

They even enable one to tolerate people's faults, and more generally, soften the hardness of the heart. All this is in addition to what we referred to earlier as the 'religious' benefits of weeping over one's sins, of apprehending the blessings of this world and the next, and remembering the joys of the Kingdom of Heaven.¹⁹

The empirical question of whether music can do all of that, even if only rarely, and how much is due to the music by itself, or as facilitated by what in Ghazali would be the co-condition of the inner effort of the listener—this we shall put aside.

What comes to mind, as the controversy shapes up especially between the approaches of Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi and Ibn Taymiyyah is an analogy with the dispute between the theist and the atheist or non-theist. The theist builds his case for the existence of a benevolent and intelligent deity by selecting the positive aspects in the world, the order, beauty, and benevolent adaptation to form the substance of the first premiss. This is what Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi does in stating his case for music, relying almost exclusively on the good effects of music.

The critic of theism is struck by all the evil in the world, the ugliness and maladaptation that plague human life, and is unwilling to sweep all this under the rug of some *ad hoc* unconvincing theodicy. The all-out critic of *ghināʾ*, in this case Ibn Taymiyyah, opens up his first premiss almost exclusively to the reprehensible effects of *ghināʾ* and dance, whether direct or associational. He also highlights texts from religious authorities that implicitly or otherwise, are negative about the two musical types.

Each side tries to minimize the weight of the empirical material the

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

other starts with. Perhaps in this respect, Ghazali's position is relatively more sensitive to the relevance of both the negative and the positive effects or aspects of listening, and thus provides a more balanced approach. At one point Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi does express the more balanced view in remarking that the moral judgement on music takes its cue from the morality of the poetry. "Its course is the course of poetry." The good is good, the bad is bad.²⁰ But this isolated remark does not seem to give character to his entire approach. Both Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi seem to be over-reliant on an opposite set of consequences neither of which can be left out of the logical picture. David Hume has taught that lesson, for the dispute over theism.

Going back to Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi's defense, there is a one-sentence argument, if it can be called that, in which he sets apart the pleasures of listening to the beautiful voice from all other pleasures. All these other pleasures whether of food, drink, wearing clothes, sexual intercourse or sport hunting—all take their toll on body and limb in terms of effort and fatigue. By contrast the pleasures of listening to music (*samāʿ*) do not impose such strain, nor cause bodily fatigue.²¹

III. *The Indirect Defense*

The second type of argument one finds in Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi is the one in which he is trying to neutralize some of the claims of his opponents. To this we now turn.

Perhaps his most interesting argument follows his remarks that the Prophet and his wife ʿAisha commended poetry, with which, *ghināʾ* is intertwined. Then referring to the chanting of the Qurʾan and the call to prayer (*ādhān*), Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi says that if melodies are thought to be reprehensible, then the chanting of the Qurʾan and the *ādhān* are

most worthy to be freed from them. And if melodies are not reprehensible, then poetry is most in need of them to establish the meter and to distinguish it from ordinary speech.²²

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9. Farmer renders "*sabīl*" as "medium", *op. cit.* p. 14

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5

²² *Ibid.*, p. 7. Here we totally agree with Farmer's translation; see his *Priceless Jewel*, p. 11

However, this argument assumes that the opponents are against melody as such, whereas someone like Ibn Taymiyyah makes it clear, in his less than wholesale condemnatory moments, that the *ghināʾ* which is objectionable, is so for reasons other than simply the fact of their having melodies. Ibn Taymiyyah would probably accuse Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi of arguing at the most general level, the level of melody as such, when it is the particulars that make it or break it.

Religious chant is permissible and recommended because of the text it carries, not the melody that embellishes it. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, in the inverse manner of his argument, seems to want to legitimize melodies in general, that is, in all cases, from their permissible occurrence in the case of the religious text of the Qurʾān and the call to prayer. Or, his immediate aim, at least, is to say that you cannot disqualify melodies if you approve of their use with religious text.

But there is another interesting problem that is raised here. To what extent and in what sense is Qurʾānic chant to be subsumed under the category of melodied text, such as that to which the term *ghināʾ* would typically apply? In other words, can Qurʾān chanting and the call to prayer be said to have melodies, and be subsumed under *ghināʾ*?

Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi does not tackle this question, but it is one that has been discussed in the literature. One interesting view is that of Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 1429) who according to Shiloah's synopsis of the content of the manuscript of his book *al-Tamhīd fī ʿilm al-tajwīd*, claims that this embellishment of Qurʾān reading (*tajwīd*) has nothing to do with music, since "the simple chant is not bound to any musical system or fixed scheme of ekphonic accents."²³

Ibn Khaldun, on the other hand, seems to take the different view implied by the following

Now, camel drivers sang when they drove their camels, and young men sang when they were alone (with each other at times of leisure and recreation). They repeated sounds and hummed them. When such humming was applied to poetry it was called singing. When it was applied to the praise of God or some kind of recitation (of the Qurʾān), it was called *taghbīr*. Abū Isḥāq al-Zajjāj explained this as derived from *al-ghābir*, (that is, melodies) ...²⁴

Two things are important about this quote. The first is that all the forms of singing mentioned, the camel driver's chant, leisure or social

²³ Shiloah, *op. cit.*, p.164. Shiloah translates the title of the book as *The Simplification of the Science of Tajwīd*

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 402-403

singing, songs in praise of God (*taḥmīd*), and the chanting of the Qur'an, all these are grouped together as sisters in a family. There is none of the complete separation we find in Ibn al-Jazarī when he considered Qur'an chanting as having nothing to do with music.

The second thing to bring out about the quotation from Ibn Khaldun is that the 'sisters in the family' are differentiated by each having a different name: *ghinā'*, in the strict sense, is here applied to melodied secular poetry, *taghbīr* is for Qur'anic chant (also called *tajwīd*), the chanting of the camel driver is known as *ḥudā'*, and then *taḥmīd* for the praising of God. The different names signal some difference among the sub-groups, all of which could be called species of *ghinā'*, now in the broad sense of this term.

There may be understandable non-semantic reasons for wanting to create a chasm between Qur'anic chant and other types of *ghinā'* and refusing to house them under the same roof, lest one taint the other in pure sacrilege. But in the semantics of classification there is no reason why a difference that separates when there are similarities that bind cannot be acknowledged in the manner implicit in the Ibn Khaldun quotation.

There may not be a "musical system or fixed scheme of ek-phonic accents" in Qur'anic or camel driver's chant, but this need not be a sufficient reason for banishing either of these from the family of melodied text. Granted they are not 'cabaret' singing, or high art songs, but neither is a mobile or a stabile simply a sculpture. We even speak of bird *song*, for some birds utter an ordered sequence of pitched sounds—that sense of "melody"—but we never want to imply that there is similarity in every respect between bird song and all forms of musical song.

That there is more than a semantic issue at the root of a position such as that advocated by Ibn al-Jazarī, is supported by the following from Farmer which we quote at length.

Yet this chanting of the Qur'an would have to be different from the singing of poetry if Muḥammad would keep his hearers' minds away from thoughts of Paganism, and so a legal fiction arose which determined that the cantillation (*taghbīr*) of the Qur'an...., was merely a modulation of the voice which could be grasped by the learned and unlearned in music alike, it being of a different genre (so it was said) from the *ghinā'* or song proper, which belonged to the professional musician.²⁵

Farmer then says that the *ādhān*, or call to prayer, "is considered a

²⁵ *A History of Arabian Music*, p. 33

cantillation of a like nature to that of the Qurʾan", and then adds that

in spite of the legal distinction between "cantillation" and "singing", we are assured by Ibn Qutaiba (d. ca 889) that the Qurʾan was sung to no different rules than those of ordinary artistic songs (*alḥān al-ghināʾ*), and the caravan song (*ḥudāʾ*).²⁶

And it is at this point that Farmer connects with Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi's argument that assumes similarity in being melodies, between song, on the one hand, and Qurʾanic chant and *ādhān*, on the other, and points out that consequently the two groups should be treated equally in either permission or forbiddance.

While there is disagreement about whether to include Qurʾanic chant and *ādhān* into the category of *ghināʾ* largely due to the tarnished image of *ghināʾ* in the narrowest sense of amusement song, especially the sensuous variety, the caravan song is religiously inoffensive, and consequently, we find no rush to banish it from the domain of music. According to Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi there is general agreement that it is permissible. Al-Qushayrī would agree on this point.²⁷

We quote Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi

And that to which most people do not object is the singing of the *naṣb* ²⁸

Farmer calls the *naṣb* a more artistic form of the *ḥudāʾ* or caravan song.²⁹

But if the caravan song is generally permitted, and, presumably, accepted as a kind of song, whereas the classification of Qurʾanic chant and the call to prayer are not acceptable to some as *ghināʾ*, this raises the question of the musical difference between the caravan song and the other two religious chants. If the issue of the difference is whether they have or do not have a melodic line component, then it would be hard to see any intrinsic difference.

For any of them can fall somewhere on a continuum between a barely-above-reading type of 'melodic' rendition and a more structured, more elaborate formally composed melody.³⁰ It would seem that the difference cannot be either musical or semantical. Once again we are confronted with another, perfectly understandable, motivation to insulate the religious chant from associating with the religiously objectionable worldly songs while bearing no grudge toward the religiously harmless caravan song.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ *Al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, p. 179

²⁸ *Al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, p. 8

²⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 4, n. 2

³⁰ See Farmer, "The Religious Music of Islam", *Jl. Royal Asiatic Soc.*, 1952, pp. 60-65

There is a similar problem raised about what is to be called *raqṣ* or dance. We encountered that in our chapter on Ibn Taymiyyah. In defending dance for sufi purposes Qinālizāde (d. 1572) says that it leads to the highest elevation and the love of God. Therefore, it has nothing to do with what is usually called dance which is “a play accompanied by the *ṭabl* and the *mizmār* (drum and double-reed instrument), and pre-sented in sessions of libertinage attended by women.”³¹

Perhaps all that needs to be said is that religious and secular dance are different kinds of dance. But clearly the non-semantic motivation that wishes to dissociate the two kinds because of the perceived difference in the worth of each kind from a religious point of view, translates into a semantic divorce.

Another writer, Sunbul Sinān (d. 16th Century) makes a similar point: that the whirling of the devotees in the celebration of *dhikr* (the reiteration of God's name(s) in religious worship) is not a dance, for the latter implies the notion of play.³² Historically, the term *raqṣ* was indeed associated with play-dance, but the issue is not entirely a historical one. Conceptually the whirling of the sufis could be classified as a kind of religious dance, in the way one considers hymns, and other forms of religious music as music, without linguistic worries that this cohabitation with ‘cabaret’ music creates moral pollution.

Yet one can understand why semantic policy is often determined by extra-conceptual, extra-logical considerations, and for the Muslim medieval writers there were good religious reasons for creating a semantic chasm between religious chant and the *ghināʾ* which is for ecstatic delight or *ṭarab*, between religious ‘dance’ and the *raqṣ* that is associated with mere amusement.

Against this background it becomes significant that some writers, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi and Ghazali would count among them, should stress that there is no valid reason for objecting to a beautiful voice or a beautiful melody just for being so described. That such a melody occurs with objectionable text or in the context of *lahw* or sensuous indulgence brings additional factors into the situation whether one is doing a semantic or a moral review. These additional factors may be reason enough to condemn the *samāʿ* of those morally deficient instances, but are not sufficient for the semantic jettisoning.

If we put the semantic question aside and, by way of provisional summary, re-focus on the reasoning in the dispute over permitting

³¹ Shiloah, *The Theory*, p. 252

³² *Ibid.*, p. 340

samāʿ, one point that would very likely elicit agreement among our authors is this. Just as it is illegitimate to infer that all melody is good because it is allowed in the best instances, namely, religious chant, it would be equally illegitimate to extend wholesale disapproval of *ghināʾ* from the fact that in some circumstances it is morally unacceptable. For this would be like condemning speech because some people gather at bars and utter obscenities. Ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 1546) attributes the opposition to music in Islam as in part due to the abuse of music in taverns, markets and carnivals.³³

Two Further Arguments Considered

1. One further argument that Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi considers in this indirect side of his case for *ghināʾ*, is one rooted in a certain asceticism towards this world and its pleasures which of course includes music. He says that the same attitude keeps people from wearing certain clothes and eating certain foods, not because these are prohibited by Law, but because it is thought to be a good thing to avoid them.³⁴

This gives Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi a chance to drive a logical wedge. For he says that this is different from claiming that God has permitted or forbidden such things. Perhaps, aware of how much reliance is placed in this controversy on quoting religious sources, and alert to the possibility that someone will try to anchor this ascetic argument in the Qurʾan and claim legal status to their view, he himself quotes a cautionary verse from the Holy Book

Say not that which your tongues falsely describe, "This is lawful, and that is unlawful" that you may fabricate a lie against Allah. Verily those who fabricate a lie against Allah shall not prosper.³⁵

It seems that Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi's objection is not to those who oppose *ghināʾ* for ascetic reasons, but to legitimating that ascetic stand by giving it the status of religious law, of a prohibition by God.

Yet there would be some who would oppose *ghināʾ* on ascetic anti-hedonic grounds, without taking the route of Qurʾanic endorsement. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi does not motivate the opponent's argument in that direction, but it may have been what prompted Ghazali to say that one should not oppose beautiful *ghināʾ* just for its giving pleasure.

However, the more common opposition on account of pleasure is

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 223-224

³⁴ *Al-ʿIqd al-farid*, p. 10

³⁵ *Sūrah XVI*, 116

not that one is against *ghinā'* merely because of the pleasure as such, but because it is the powerful kind of worldly pleasure that is incompatible with, and pulls one away from the path of God. But that turns it into a different argument from the one with the simple anti-hedonic ascetic premiss considered by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, the one that is akin to opposing the pleasures of some foods and clothing.

2. In the final consideration that we have selected, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi makes a connection between opposition to *ghinā'* and ignorance of it. He says that a man may be ignorant of singing, or may feign ignorance, and that as a result neither enjoins it nor forbids it.³⁶ Then follows an anecdote.

Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi tells of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī who was asked what he held regarding singing. Al-Baṣrī replied that singing helps in obeying God, in observing the ties of kinship and supporting friends. This seemed to his questioner like a tangential answer, for to that reply he said that he was asking not about this but about singing, whether a man should sing. Al-Baṣrī then asks, but how should he sing? The original questioner demonstrated while twisting his mouth and blowing through his nostrils. This seemed thoroughly distasteful to al-Baṣrī. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi then remarks that al-Baṣrī “only objected to distorting the face and deforming the mouth”.³⁷ He then adds the following remark

And if he had objected to singing (as such), then it would only have been in the way of the people of al-ʿIrāq, and we have (already) mentioned their dislike of it.³⁸

Then on the following page in the course of another anecdote, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi goes beyond the matter of the Iraqi dislike, and quotes a certain al-Zuhri who makes explicit reference to their ignorance

May Allah curse you, O people of al-ʿIrāq, how palpable is your ignorance and how incorrect your opinion.³⁹

A corollary of referring to ignorance of *ghinā'* as one explanation of opposition to it, is brought out in another story reported as told by Saʿd al-Zuhri to whom the Caliph Ḥārūn al-Rashīd said that he had heard that Mālik Ibn Ānās of al-Madina forbids singing. Al-Zuhri replied by questioning whether Ibn Ānās had the legitimate power to forbid

³⁶ Al-ʿIqd al-farīd, p. 10

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11; see p. 17 of Farmer's translation which we have followed here.

and to permit. Even Muḥammad, he added, had the power only by the revelation from God. "So who gave this power to Mālik Ibn Ānās?"

Then moving from the question of the legitimacy of power to the substance of the condemnation, al-Zuhrī told of a wedding occasion at which Ibn Ānās sang two verses of a song. Now according to *al-ʿAghānī*,⁴⁰ this Mālik Ibn Ānās when he was a youth wanted to become a professional singer but his mother diverted him from this. She wanted him to go into jurisprudence. As a result he upheld a public persona which opposed singing, hence the newsworthiness of the fact that he sang at that wedding. This career tension with his mother would explain both that he was ordinarily opposed to singing, and nonetheless himself sang at that particular occasion.⁴¹

At any rate, al-Zuhrī comments on Ibn Ānās' opposition to singing by saying: "If I had heard M ālik condemning (singing) and I had the power, I would improve his education."⁴² This is meant to be the way to correct the ignorance of the one who opposes singing.

Considering that Ibn Abd Rabbihi is offering this story of al-Zuhrī's in connection with his general linking between opposition to singing and ignorance of it, one cannot help wondering whether this last remark by al-Zuhrī is not a remark that Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi would have loved to make himself.

⁴⁰ Al-Iṣṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, IV, 39

⁴¹ See the Farmer translation, p. 18, n. 2, and Robson *Tracts on Listening to Music*, p.34, n. 1

⁴² *Al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, p. 11

CHAPTER NINE

AND SOME OTHERS

I. *Ibn Khaldun*

The Origin of Music

We characterized Ibn Sina's approach to the question of the origin of sound (*al-ṣawṭ*), which is the genus of which music is a species, as biological. He placed meaningful sound in the context of animals and humans in their natural environments seeking to avoid danger and to communicate with one another for any of a number of reasons, including the need to attract a mate and perpetuate the species.

Ibn Khaldun, gives his own quasi-biological account of the origin of singing which is tied up with the origin of gladness. Joy and gladness "are due to the expansion and diffusion of the animal spirits", while sadness is due to the contraction of these. This bio-chemical causal analysis is applied to the case of a drunken person to explain the "inexpressible joy and gladness" experienced by such a person

" because the vapor of the spirit in his heart is pervaded by natural heat which the power of the wine generates in his spirit. The spirit, as a result, expands, and there is joy.

A similar account is given to explain the joy from taking a bath

Likewise, when those who enjoy a hot bath inhale the air of the bath, so that the heat of the air enters their spirits and makes them hot, they are found to experience joy.¹

When Ibn Khaldun then observes that "It often happens that they (those taking a bath) start singing, as singing has its origin in gladness", one is more inclined to think of this as an observation about one possible source for *ghinā'*, rather than a global theory about music as such, in the manner and on the scale of what Ibn Sina had proposed.

Thus with Ibn Khaldun who is ever the historian and philosopher of history, his more serious and plausible thinking lies elsewhere. And in this case the origin of *ghinā'* is in the context of the develop-

¹ *Al-Muqaddimah* I, p. 174. All pagination for Ibn Khaldun refers to the Rosenthal translation.

ment of societies or civilizations.

Music is classified as a science; it is the third mathematical science. But while it is mentioned among the sciences, it is not discussed there. Instead it is treated in the chapter on crafts, in which there is an explanation of the conditions of their development, and their fading away. Among the crafts music is a late bloomer.

... it should be known that singing originates in a civilization when it becomes abundant and (people) progress from the necessities to the conveniences, and then to the luxuries, and have a great diversity of (luxuries). Then, the craft of singing originates, because it is required only by those who are free from all the necessary and urgent needs of making a living and care for domestic and other needs. It is in demand only by those who are free from all other worries and seek various ways of having pleasure.²

Perhaps the reason why Ibn Khaldun discusses music among the crafts rather than among the sciences, is that the aspect of music that engages him as a historian is not its theoretical study, but the phenomenon of music as it is created, performed and consumed in a society at certain stages of its development. And the craft aspect is the creating and performing aspect.

The stage of civilization at which this craft emerges is one where attention turns to luxury, understood in this context as freedom from the worries imposed by the necessities of daily survival. At this point humans "seek various ways of having pleasure". This point is important to bring out not only in the account of the origin of music, but also for the understanding of two other things about the fate of music in society. The first, is that when a society begins to dissolve, music, being the craft born in the soil of luxury, is doomed by its very superfluity. For luxuries are the first baggage to be jettisoned when the ship is sinking. "It...is the first to disappear from a given civilization when it disintegrates and retrogresses."³

The second reason for the significance of this account, is that the kind of soil from which it emerges together with the built-in urge to "seek various ways of having pleasure", sets music on a collision course with what Ibn Khaldun calls the severity of early Islam, as we shall see shortly.

Pleasure and Musical Esthetics

Although music has many functions and produces many effects in the

² *Ibid.* II, p. 401

³ *Ibid.* II, p. 405

listener, it is pleasure and the experience of emotions in the soul which is distinctive of its place in human life. Ibn Khaldun mentions the way music, especially “the beating of drums and the blowing of trumpets and horns”, is used by royal authority as part of their emblems, along with banners and flags.

Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun refers to Aristotle’s *Book on Politics* in which there is mention of the real significance of music as that of frightening the enemy in war. Ibn Khaldun comments

The explanation given by Aristotle—if it was he who gave it ⁴—is correct in some respects. But the truth is that listening to music and sounds no doubt causes pleasure and emotion in the soul.⁵

From this one can infer that the effect of pleasure and emotion are the more typical ones. Pleasure, in particular, is what is emphasized in the account of the origin of music, as we have seen. It is also what people seek when society attains the stage beyond preoccupation with basic necessities. It is also the tenor of the explanation of what this special kind of “pleasure and emotion” amount to. For he says

The spiritual temper of man is thereby affected by a kind of drunkenness, which causes him to make light of difficulties and to be willing to die in the very condition in which he finds himself.⁶

Here he is talking about the kind of pleasure from listening to music for which there is the special Arabic word : *ṭarab*. And it is precisely the potency of this kind of pleasure peculiar to music alone, recognized by the analogy with drunkenness, that is both its attraction to the listener and the source of anxiety for religious authorities.

There is brief mention of the usual effects of music on some animals, camels and horses, and of its use in war to move men to bravery and cause them to be willing to die. This is on account of the cheerfulness created in the soul by music. That is the ‘bio-chemical’ positive it creates in the soul which we touched on earlier in this chapter.⁷

Before we take up the explanation of why music gives pleasure, there is an interesting effect of music mentioned by Ibn Khaldun which we have not seen elsewhere. It is common to note the naturalness of gliding from poetry to music. Both have a sensuous quality, both have rhythm, and both have a tune. Indeed the move in this dire-

⁴ As it turns out the passage is by Pseudo-Aristotle. See *Ibid.* II, p. 48, n. 546

⁵ *Ibid.* II, p. 48

⁶ *Ibid.* II, pp. 48-49

⁷ *Ibid.* II, p. 49

tion from poetry to music has been noted by Ibn Khaldun himself, among others.⁸ What he now observes is that listening to music is a good condition for *creating* poetry.

The poet, needs solitude. The place he looks at should be a beautiful one with water and flowers. He likewise needs music.⁹

This is obviously not a relation in which music is a virtually sufficient condition for creating poetry, in the way a certain song in battle can instill bravery. For music here is listed among a number of other conditions, not all of which are included in the above quotation. Nonetheless what is interesting about this is that music is credited here with a productive influence on the *imagination*, rather than on the usual affective or the bodily states, or on moral character traits.

Let us mention one final function of music according to Ibn Khaldun. He was one of the writers in Islam who is well versed in the history of sufism (Islamic mysticism) and sufi thought. But he is not only knowledgeable, he is also largely sympathetic to their claims. In mentioning the spiritual effects of music in mysticism, without following that with the condemnations of the more orthodox theologians such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Khaldun places himself in the camp of a long line of Islamic thinkers who have a broad view of the scope of music and are clearly cognizant of the important aspect of music which these thinkers call the serious side (*jiddī*).

Sufis attain remoteness from sensual perception by listening to music. In this way they become "completely free" for supernatural perception. Thus music assists in "exchanging bodily perceptions for spiritual ones". Yet Ibn Khaldun is Muslim enough to emphasize that this attainment does not put the mystic at any level equal to that of the Prophet. The mystical state remains inferior to that of prophecy.¹⁰

And now to the explanation of why music gives us pleasure.

Ibn Khaldun gives a relational account of the pleasure derived from music. The pleasures we derive from our various senses are a function of three things: (1) a certain quality in the object perceived, (2) a certain condition in the perceiver, and (3) the way that quality in the object strikes the perceiver in that condition. Pleasure is a resultant from the agreeable way in which (1) relates to (2).

⁸ *Ibid.* II, p. 402

⁹ *Ibid.* III, p. 384

¹⁰ *Ibid.* I, pp. 230-231

If (such a quality) is proportionate and agreeable to the person who has the perception, it is pleasant. If it is repugnant to him or discordant, it is painful.¹¹

The requisite quality in the object is harmony. In the case of objects that we see, it is the harmonious arrangement in their forms, lines and other qualities. For the sounds we hear, it is "harmony and lack of discordance in the sounds".

But there must also be a harmony, that is, an agreeableness, between those arranged lines and forms, or those non-discordant sounds, and the soul that perceives. There is then the harmony in the objects perceived, and a harmony in the interaction between them and the soul. The vocabulary that describes the condition of the soul of the one perceiving is the vocabulary of spirits that suffuse the body. Thus in the case of agreeable smells, they "correspond to the temper of the vaporous cordial spirit". Aromatic plants and flowers "smell better and are more agreeable to the spirit, because heat, which is the temper of the cordial spirit, is preponderant in them."¹²

Ibn Khaldun's relational view of the pleasure from listening to music yields a relational theory of beauty. For beauty is the harmony in the object, insofar as it interacts agreeably with the perceiver. "Beauty in the objects of hearing is harmony and lack of discordance in the sounds."¹³ And that harmony must be experienced as "in harmony with the soul".¹⁴

Beauty in music is a function of how sounds are combined, how they relate the one to the other in sequence, whether the intervals they form are harmonious or not, whether the transition within a piece of music follows the rules established by musicologists, very much in the manner in which syntax in language determines proper and improper sequence.

Now the harmony that is beauty may be simple or complex. In an involved piece of music, what Ibn Khaldun calls a composition, the harmony of all the elements is complex, and requires some knowledge as a prerequisite for enjoyment. One can recall Katib's special emphasis on this point. Simple harmony needs no special instruction. Some are gifted by nature for appreciating the simple harmony in music. "The common people call such an aptitude 'musicalness' (*mid-*

¹¹ *Ibid.* II, p. 397

¹² *Ibidem.*

¹³ *Ibid.* II, p. 398

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*

mār)".¹⁵ This gift is illustrated in the case of chanting the Qur'an. Some can without instruction "modulate their voices as if they were flutes". They have a natural feel in their performance and can "cause emotion through the beauty of their performance and the harmony of their modes."

This leads Ibn Khaldun to a discussion of the issue of whether the Qur'an should be chanted and whether that chant is singing or different from singing. To this we now turn.

Music and Islam

There are two questions concerning the relation between the reading of the Qur'an and *ghinā'*. The first is whether the Qur'an should be chanted at all. The second is whether Qur'anic chant is a part of music, a species of *ghinā'*.

On the first, Ibn Khaldun begins by reporting the position taken by the founders of the Schools of Law in Islam. Mālik is said to have been against the use of melodies in Qur'anic recitation, while al-Shāfi'ī allowed it.

Ibn Khaldun then turns immediately to the second question, passing through a link between the two. For he says that the first controversy should not be over whether one adds "artistic musical melodies" to the recitation. Were this the issue then there would have been general agreement that this addition should be forbidden. All that is involved in Qur'anic chant is the "plain music" or the simple modulation that he spoke of when talking about the natural gift of musicalness. And this is an altogether different thing from the artistic musical melodies of *ghinā'*.¹⁶ And that is the answer to the second question as to whether Qur'anic chant is a part of music.

Now he does admit that Qur'anic chant and the melodies of *ghinā'* have some features in common. For example, in both, for each letter or each sound, there is what he calls a quantity of sound. Vowels are lengthened or shortened as the case requires. In giving even a minimum of pitch to what is being pronounced, a time value is also given, and this must be what he means by the quantity of sound.¹⁷

But when it comes to stating the difference, Ibn Khaldun turns from the descriptive mode to the didactic. He offers no qualitative differences to support his claim that "The art of singing is something entirely unconnected with the Qur'an." For instance, he does not say

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, II, p. 399

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, II, p. 400

¹⁷ *Ibidem.*

that the tones in Qur'anic chant, unlike the case of *ghinā'*, are not part of a melodic or modal system. Rather, he turns to the different question of what is *appropriate* for the Holy Book.

In effect he says two things. First, melodious music detracts from the primary task in reading the Qur'an which is to convey the text with clear pronunciation: "Thus, melodious music can, by no means, be combined with the pronunciation under consideration in connection with the Qur'an."¹⁸ Second, the aims in the recitation of the Qur'an are weighty and should cause awe. "It is not an occasion to give pleasure in the perception of beautiful sounds."¹⁹

The gist of Ibn Khaldun's position is that melodious music *should* not be combined with Holy Text, lest it detract from the message of the latter, and that whatever chant is used should be of the simple kind that involves merely the modulation of the voice. He does seem to admit, however, that even this simple chant in which "a person arranges his sounds in certain harmonious cadences" is perceived by those who know about singing, as music.²⁰

As to the question of whether Ibn Khaldun himself considers Qur'anic chant as music, the answer is that at best it is what he calls the simple harmony that requires no instruction, rather than the melodious music in composition "with which the science of music has to deal".²¹

Ibn Khaldun traces what in effect are three stages in the attitude towards music or *ghinā'*. Before Islam the songs of the Arabs were of the simple type of melodious music. That was widely accepted and enjoyed.

Then came the rise of Islam. The Arabs through whom Islam was introduced to the world had "their well-known desert attitude and low standard of living". This went along with a "religious severity" that opposed all activities of leisure. These were thought to detract from the religious goals. Music was grouped along with all the games that one sought to play in moments of leisure, and was thus avoided "to some degree". All that was permitted was the cadenced reading of the Qur'an and the traditional humming of poetry.²² In the *Aghānī*, there is a different view on this. It is said that at the dawn of Islam there was no specific ban on music.²³ The difference might still be reconcil-

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ *Ibid.* II, p. 399

²² *Ibid.* II, pp. 403-404

²³ *Op. cit.*, VIII, pp. 85-86

led within the ample space of the vagueness of the time reference.

Then followed what we are here calling the third stage. The conditions for the emergence of the crafts materialize, namely, wealth, prosperity and the propensity for luxury, and with these the demand for activities of leisure. The Arabs were flooded with musicians who left the Persians and Byzantines to sing in their midst. The poems of the Arabs were set to music, and by the time the ʿAbbāsids were in power the craft of singing reached its perfection.²⁴

This is not only a typical account of Ibn Khaldun the historian and philosopher of history, but it also specifically links the desert virtues of hardiness and ascetic simplicity together with the lack of wealth, all on the one hand, with the severity in attitude of early Islam towards the pleasures that distract.

Furthermore, again speaking in the dispassionate vein of the historian that he was, he explains the flourishing of the more developed art of music in terms of socio-economic conditions. As a historian, he is saying that despite the official Islamic attitude against all activities of leisure, including music, the operative historical factors that brought on the flourishing of music as an art are the ones that count. The attitude of religious authorities may be correct, but it is not what moves the course of history at its basic level. There is the implication that even that attitude itself is to be explained historically in terms of the actual factors that motivate history, namely, such things as the (secular) conditions of desert attitude and absence of wealth.²⁵

II. *Majd Al-Dīn Al-Ghazālī*

Majd al-Dīn is the brother of the famous Abū Ḥāmid, and died in 1121, ten years after the latter did. His thinking on the subject of the permissibility of listening to music is, like that of Abū Ḥāmid, more open than most. In his *Bawāriq al-Ilmāʿ*^c he argues in favor of religious *samāʿ*^c, as his brother does, but the arguments and the subtleties are all his own.

He follows two strategies in his arguments. In the one type of argument his first premiss, whether explicitly stated or not, is that the Prophet and his Companions favored *samāʿ*^c by either word or deed. These people are close to God. Therefore those who oppose *samāʿ*^c

²⁴ *Ibid.* II, p. 404

²⁵ See Shehadi "Theism, Mysticism and Scientific History in Ibn Khaldun", in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, ed. by Michael Marmura, pp. 265-279

oppose those who are close to God. Or as he puts it in another way: to condemn *samāʿ* as *ḥarām*, or forbidden, is to condemn the Prophet.

The other type of argument presents variants of the validity or invalidity of moving from some to all, or from all to some.

Here are a few samples of the first line of argument.

To Oppose Samāʿ Is to Oppose the Prophet

1. The first is the most general form in which this type of argument appears. Majd al-Dīn says that whoever condemns *samāʿ* in absolute terms has to reckon with a consequence of his condemnation, namely, that the Prophet did something forbidden (*ḥarām*).²⁶ What he takes for granted here is that there are instances in which the Prophet did in fact listen approvingly to *ghināʾ*.²⁷ This is supplied in the next example.

2. One *ḥadīth* that seems to be generally agreed upon as authentic is the one about the Prophet being present at his wife ʿAisha's house when two young girls were singing. When Abū Ṭālib entered and reacted negatively by referring to the singing as the reed-pipe (*miz-mār*) of the Devil, the Prophet is reported to have said that it was a holiday, and to each people their holiday. This has been taken as implying permission for singing on holidays, at least.

But the aspect of this occasion that concerns us here is the example of the Prophet as being present and presumably listening to singing. We may recall that Ibn Taymiyyah some years later was to distinguish between the Prophet being present and *hearing* the singing versus *listening* to it, and thus doubting that the Prophet did the latter. However, this distinction is not made by Majd al-Dīn. What the latter wants to say is that here is a clear instance in which the Prophet listened approvingly to singing. For anyone to say that singing is forbidden is to say that the Prophet listened to what is forbidden.²⁷

3. Saints are reported to have danced at auditions, therefore whoever opposes *samāʿ* and dance opposes those close to God.²⁸

Some and All

Examples of this type of argument are more numerous. We shall select a few.

1. From the very occasion at which the Prophet was present when the two maidens sang, another point is brought out. Someone might

²⁶ *Bawāriq al-Ilmāʿ*, p. 120

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 132

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 155

argue that the type of occasion, namely, a holiday, is all that one is entitled to legitimize from this example, so that anyone who wants to argue in favor of permitting all *ghināʾ* from this instance is making an unwarranted jump in reasoning.

But Majd al-Dīn turns the logical punch around and says with perfect conciseness: “particularizing the reason does not preclude the generality of judgement.”²⁹ In other words, “on holidays”, does not mean “*only* on holidays”. The Prophet could consistently have had a mental list of other occasions on which singing would be allowed, but on this given occasion he only talked about holidays. Thus from “on holidays”, it is true, one cannot conclude “at all occasions”, or “all *ghināʾ*”. On this the objector is right. But by the same token, from “on holidays” one cannot conclude “at no *other* occasion”, namely, “only on holidays”.

2. Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, declares a reliable source, reported that some Companions persevered in audition. Someone might say: we follow the Companions on everything else, but not on this. This is not good policy, according to Majd al-Dīn. It would be like saying, we follow the Prophet in all save the matter of *ghināʾ*. This is tantamount to saying we do not really follow the Prophet.³⁰

3. Someone might say: it is all right for the Prophet to listen to *ghināʾ*, but not for us. Majd al-Dīn replies: The Prophet is a lawgiver, and in that role he speaks to all of us. If the implications of his words and deeds were otherwise, he would have made that clear.³¹

4. Then the question of the permissibility of dance is taken up. The issue arises in the context of the following story. Ibn Ḥanbal tells on the authority of ʿAlī, son-in-law of the Prophet and fourth Orthodox Caliph, that the latter went to the Prophet together with his brother Jaʿfar, and Zayd, the Prophet’s adopted son. To Zayd the Prophet said: “you are my close one”, to Jaʿfar: You are akin to my nature and character, and to ʿAlī, “you are of my own”. At each one of these utterances, each of the ones to whom it was addressed hopped (*hajala*).

Now the *hajal* is said to be a special kind of dance, and the Prophet did not condemn what each did, implying approval. The general enters into the particular, so if one species is allowed, so is the genus. Thus if the opponents grant the permissibility of *tahjīl*, Majd al-Dīn argues, then having allowed the part, the whole should be

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 133

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 134

allowed as well.³²

To secure the argument Majd al-Dīn will have to add something like “unless there is some special reason not to, in any particular type of dance”. Instead, he resorts to religious authority, and says that if the implied understanding that all dance be permitted from the Prophet’s having allowed the hop, then he would have made that clear. The trust in the careful thoroughness of the Prophet’s guidance as lawgiver requires one to assume that if the Prophet had wanted to exclude other types of dance, that would have been his chance to do so, but he did not take it. A careful legislator would not want to leave loopholes.

The logic of this case is different from the one about singing on holidays. The inference there was to other *occasions*, not types of song. And unlike ‘types of dance’, ‘occasions’ do not form a logical class for purposes of generalization, since the substance at issue is the activity that takes place on the occasion. To move from one type of dance to other types of dance glides on a logical rail, in a way in which moving from holidays to other occasions does not. And although there are *types* of occasions, and one can logically move within instances of a certain type, it is not instructive for purposes of logical inference to say that what all these types have in common is being occasions. Another way of putting this point is that “dance” names a genre, and hence a logical class, whereas “occasion” does not.

By way of summary for this type of argument Majd al-Dīn, implying that there is no defensible absolute condemnation of music, says that a censure in general terms must be particularized, at which point we discover that such censure applies to some not to all *ghināʿ*. It applies only to what turns one away from God.³³

And by way of summary for the whole subject of *samāʿ*, he says that it has been established that *samāʿ* is absolutely permissible, and the one who denies it is either an infidel or a profligate.³⁴ To listen to the detractors would be to miss a chance to be like the saints.³⁵

The Condemnation and Symbolism of Instruments

Certain musical instruments have been condemned by many sources, because they were classified as instruments of diversion, or because they were associated with the effeminate players who used them, or

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 139-140

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 147

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 156

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 178

were thought to be instruments by which the devil tries to lure humans away from God, or because the Prophet or some other authoritative person said or did something that explicitly or implicitly censured their use.

Majd al-Dīn lists some of the forbidden instruments, namely, the *jank* (harp), *rabāb* (viol), *ūd* (lute), *barbāt* (Persian lute), *mizmār* (reed-pipe)³⁶, and so on. Neither the completeness nor the accuracy of the list is the point we are concerned with here. Rather we want to turn to two small points of argument on the subject and then proceed to the points about the symbolism of instruments.

Of the various instruments that were forbidden, the *mizmār*, is tied to a report about the Prophet who is said to have plugged his ears with his fingers upon hearing the instrument being played. This has been the basis for the condemnation of that instrument ever since. But the fact itself of plugging his ears is fraught with ambiguity, as are all acts which have many aspects to them, and it is not always clear which of the aspects is to be taken for authoritative reference. In the case before us, the ambiguity lies in the motivation. It is not clear that it was the instrument itself that the Prophet was objecting to, rather than, say, the loudness or the badness of the playing. Or, as Ghazali (Abu Ḥamid) suggests, the Prophet may not have wanted his thoughts to be interrupted.³⁷

Majd al-Dīn takes up the fact that the tambourine without metal plates is permitted while the same with metal plates is not. He sees no reason for this. For if one is permitted the other should be also, unless of course there is some holy text that explicitly forbids both.³⁸

However, the more interesting 'rescue' of musical instruments, of some anyway, is the higher meaning given to them, from the mystical perspective, by the symbolic interpretation of some of their key features. For example, the skin of the tambourine is absolute existence. Striking it brings forth the divine visitation, from the interior to the exterior. The five small bells stand for various ranks of being, from the highest which is the prophetic to the immamate rank. The flute is the human essence, and its nine apertures symbolize the apertures of the body.³⁹

The same style of interpretation is applied to the whirling of the mystic dance which is the circling of the gaze and thought of Allah as

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 175

³⁷ *Iḥyāʾ*, II 8, p. 252

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 154

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 157-158

they penetrate the levels of the things that are.⁴⁰ And it is not uncommon in the literature to interpret the whirling as a symbolic imitation of the movement of the heavenly spheres.

On the Nobility of Samāʿ

In the end, Majd al-Dīn's defense of *samāʿ* consists of a number of points about the nobility of *samāʿ*, where he is clearly talking about mystical auditions. More elaborate and articulate than most, he extols the virtues of mystical *samāʿ* in six points.

1. Movement and rest are two states that are associated with all things. The measured sounds of *samāʿ* have an impact on the inner being of the listener. It dissolves the superfluities of the spirit and moves it upwards. This is a recognition of the effective force of music. But, since the music is serious, spiritual and not frivolous or diversionary, the direction of movement created by the force of the music is spiritual and upward.⁴¹

2. *Samāʿ* also has a nourishing effect. Just as food nourishes and strengthens the body, mystical audition nourishes and strengthens the heart. With the help of the significant meanings of the poetry, light and life are brought down from the unseen world to nourish and strengthen and nourish the heart.⁴²

3. Through audition one can get detached from the ties to external things, and become prepared to accept the spiritual lights and secrets that are otherwise hidden. This refines the heart, opens it to disclosures, and facilitates union, all without a new religious exercise.⁴³

One wonders if this seeming sufficiency of *samāʿ* in producing such results in the seeker is an over-enthusiasm, for it is a consistent tenet in sufism that inner moral and spiritual preparation is a precondition for any advance in enlightenment and union.

4. At audition sessions, music, and sometimes dance, are supplemented by the repetition of some key word, usually referring to Allah, either directly or indirectly. This part is known as *dhikr*, or iteration, and can of course be engaged in without the music or dance. On this point by Majd al-Dīn, the word in question is "*Huwa*", or "He", and it was common practice to lengthen the 'a' at the end of the word.

The sound of "*Huwa*" reiterated, the added measured notes toge-

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 159

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 162

ther with the meaning in the poetry, all contribute to making the spirit joyful. The body is also drawn to the level of the spirit, and there is a lifting of the veil and the apprehension of realities.⁴⁴ The metaphor of the lifting of the veil is very commonly used in sufi literature.

Muslim orthodoxy has always been wary of the claim of many sufis of being able to reach God without the path of the revealed Word, and what it prescribes in belief and practice. At the conclusion of the present point and of the next one, Majd al-Dīn does not allay Orthodox fears when he says that these results from *samāʿ* "are not attainable by many religious exercises"; or, under the next point: "audition may yield what is not obtained from many acts of devotion." The qualifier in both instances, many rather than all, may soften the blow somewhat.

5. *Samāʿ* has two aspects. On the outside there is movement, but internally there is quiescence. An increase in external movement can coincide with a stronger quiescence in the heart which is thus detached from everything except God and His presence.

The same dual aspect applies to the five duties required of every Muslim, the five pillars. Fasting is the only one which is internal, while the other four are external. And these are: the witnessing to the one-and-only-ness of Allah and to His Prophet Muhammad, prayer, alms-giving and the pilgrimage. Perhaps in a gesture towards orthodoxy, a kind of move, engaged in much more globally and systematically by his brother Abū Ḥāmid, Majd al-Dīn says that the inner secret of *samāʿ* includes or contains (*yashtamil*) the five pillars, but it is not explained how this is so.⁴⁵

6. Finally, and briefly, the various stations, or stages on the way in the sufi journey (the *maqāmāt*) culminate in states (*aḥwāl*), and the claim here is that *samāʿ* "comprises" these states which are the ends or goals of the stations.⁴⁶ Without explaining how this is so, the point that remains is that *samāʿ* and the mystical goal are inseparable.

III. *Ibn Al-ʿArabī*

For mystics or writers on mysticism, such as the two Ghazalis, but for critics as well, such as Ibn Taymiyyah, mystical *samāʿ* is a subclass of the family of organized tones and melodies one would call

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 163

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 163-164

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 164

music. In terms of classification, mystical *samāʿ* is on a coordinate level with other sub-divisions: military music, festive music, travelers' songs, pilgrimage songs, and so on.

Like the two Ghazalis, Ibn al-ʿArabi is a writer on mysticism, and perhaps the greatest theorist of mysticism in Islam, and like them he argues in favor of *samāʿ*. But Ibn al-ʿArabi's mystical theory is highly complex and often very obscure. It is more metaphysical-cosmological than theological-religious. Certainly it is not what one would call plain musical-theoretical. And this is clearly reflected in his views on *samāʿ*. For him mystical *samāʿ* is a sub-class of a broader kind of *samāʿ* which has nothing to do with music.

The first step in Ibn al-ʿArabi's view assumes for its basic paradigm the semiotic communications relationship of *saying* and *listening*.⁴⁷ Yet this communication need not be in language, but of course includes that mode.

In the second step Ibn al-ʿArabi gives a cosmological form to this saying-listening relation. God's creative "Be" (*kun*) becomes the saying in the cosmic form of the semiotic relationship. A link is thus established between Speech and existence, emphasized further by his saying that silence is non-being. The listening is 'done' by the world, presumably by being (*wa l-samāʿ min al-ʿālam*). This is also called *al-samāʿ al-kawnī* which can translate in either of two ways. "*Al-kawnī*" could mean "pertaining to existence", or it could mean "pertaining to the world or the universe". Either way it fits in with the meaning intended, for the two expressions have the same extension. In any case, this *al-samāʿ al-kawnī* is paired off in contrast with *al-qawl al-ilāhī*, or the divine Speech.⁴⁸

This cosmic listening, or the listening done by the cosmos, could be a poetic way of saying that the world's very coming to be is its listening to the divine. And it could mean more than the sense of *obeying*. Existence can be seen here as the concretization of the "Be", the existential side of the divine utterance, the existential echo heard by what came to be in coming to be.

But there is a less obscure sense, and the one that more clearly fits with what follows in Ibn al-ʿArabi's text. The created world is God's message to us, and we are the listeners to His existential saying. For in that creation and through the series of prophets, God is telling us what He wants from us listeners. "Were it not for the speech, we do not know the purpose of the Agent and what He wants from us."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah*, p.366

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

This interpretation of the coming to be of the world as an act of communication also conforms with the explication of one form of *samāʿ*, the spiritual *samāʿ* (*al-samāʿ al-rūḥānī*) as a kind of 'reading' of the world, as one reads a book. For the world is a written book, and the author is God. The listener-reader is the human mind. "The Pen speaks, and the mind's ears listen".⁵⁰

Now all this has nothing to do with music, for it is a *samāʿ* of what is unconnected with the world of sound-pitch and melody. It is *al-samāʿ al-muṭlaq* (absolute audition) which is receptive to meaning alone, and is not tied to musical sounds. The latter is *al-samāʿ al-muqayyad* (bound or restricted audition); it is *ghināʾ*.⁵¹ Thus the *samāʿ* that is connected with music is but a sub-class of a broader kind of *samāʿ* which is conceived in a semiotic-cosmological way.

Such a highly metaphysical scheme in terms of which musical *samāʿ* is placed, doubles up as the theoretical defence of musical *samāʿ*. But here it is no longer the mundane music that tranquilizes babies, goads camels and cheers a wedding party. This musical *samāʿ* that is being defended, like the non-musical cosmic variety, becomes a conduit between the seeker and God.

The division between the absolute and the bound *samāʿ* is further refined. For the latter is now subdivided into *samāʿ ilāhī* (divine), *samāʿ rūḥānī* (spiritual) and *samāʿ ṭabīʿī* (natural). The latter is of no mystical significance, rather it is in the domain of music in the general sense. This is where the science of melodies belongs, the four strings of the *ʿūd* and their connections with the four elements and the four humors.⁵¹

The other two are the ones with mystical relevance, and they are stratified in terms of the degree of the unity of being which is paired off with the listening. The divine *samāʿ* presupposes the truest view of reality as Ibn al-ʿArabi sees it. Here everything is God or an aspect of God. Even when mystics, listen, "there is no sayer nor listener except God". *Samāʿ* in this perspective is an internal transaction between aspects of God, for there is nothing which is not an aspect of God.⁵² Since this is a *samāʿ* which is music-connected, the listener experiencing the audition does so within the framework of this outlook. "It is the *samāʿ* from everything, in everything and by everything."⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 367

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 367

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ Ibidem. This point is repeated in his *al-Tadbīrāt al-ilāhiyyah*, ms No 5917, Bilbl. Ntle (Paris), folio 63a. See also Ghazali, *Op. cit.* II, p. 256 (*li, bi, fī and min Allah*).

As to the spiritual *samāʿ* (*al-rūḥānī*), this occurs in a perspective in which the unity of being is perceived as less dense, God and the world are still paired off as a unit, but it is a unity created by God's communicating agency. Thus the world is seen as a tablet on which God writes and we are the ones who read-listen. Our hearts are also tablets on which God writes how we should be. We read God's creative agency in the things that are, and we read for the direction of our lives in the guiding words of God.

If one posits these perspectives with their degrees in the unity of being, the mystic who takes the route of musical audition has to be elevated by the musical experience through these degrees of unity. These mystics have accordingly taken the route of the *samāʿ muqayyad*. But this kind of *samāʿ* is dispensable for the *akābir*, those advanced in sufism. Thus mystical musical audition is not for everyone. The elders do not need it. But the novices should not be exposed to it because they are not yet strong enough to take the powerful and unsettling experience of serious musical audition, for this is not the kind of music which merely gives ecstatic delight, or one that needs no special knowledge.

A musical *samāʿ* that elevates one through the mystical stages towards unified being is not for amateurs nor for novices. That is why it is often suggested in the literature that the novice, if he is to listen, must be in the presence of a guide or teacher. Where mystical musical audition belongs most of all is at the middle stage in the sufi journey. There it is helpful in the advance, and can be experienced without danger.

These cautionary matchings of audition with the stage of the seeker is common among the major writers on sufism who are sympathetic to *samāʿ*. One finds this, as well, in al-Sarrāj, al-Makkī, al-Hujwīrī, al-Ghazali (Abū Hāmid), al-Suhrawardī (Shihāb al-Dīn), and others.

Like Wittgenstein's ladder that the climber dispenses with after getting to the top, musical *samāʿ* would be jettisoned by those who have arrived. However, what cannot be done away with, according to Ibn al-ʿArabi, is the soundless *samāʿ*, the absolute *samāʿ*, *al-samāʿ al-muṭlaq*.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 368

APPENDIX

The material in the table that follows can be divided into two categories. There are those connections between the musical and the non-musical that are bound together by the principle of affinity. Some of these are understandable, for example, *al-zīr*, the thinnest string on the *‘ūd* corresponds to fire, while *al-bamm*, the thickest, corresponds to earth which is the heaviest of the elements. But some groupings are not readily clear, such as combining *al-mathnā* with the imaginative power and the digestive capacity. The other sort of connection is the effects of music of a given character on body and soul.

The aim in knowing all these connections is also twofold. The first and foremost, for the philosopher seeking theoretical knowledge of music, is to know its place in the general scheme of things. If music is connected in the many ways shown in the table, then that will be the object of the theoretical knowledge.

The other aim is practical. The philosopher who now is also a doctor-musician can use the knowledge about the place of music and its effects in order to devise for the individual case at hand, a cure for body or soul.

Our table is based largely on a similar table devised by Maḥmūd Aḥmad al-Ḥifnī in his useful study of Kindi's *Risālah fī ajzā' khabariyyah fī l-mūsīqī*. We have extended Ḥifnī's table, and incorporated material from Kindi's other works, notably, *Kitāb al-muṣawwītāt al-watariyyah*, *Risālah fī l-luḥūn wa l-nagham* and *Risālah fī khubr šinā'at al-ta'rif*. We have found that *al-Muṣawwītāt* reverses the places in the table in three pairs of items: (1) earth and water, (2) midnight to sunrise, for sunset to midnight and (3) black bile and phlegm. The placings in some of the other texts make more sense, especially since soothing music belongs at sleep time, while cheerful music makes more sense at the end of the day rather than before sleep.

Henry Farmer constructed a similar, though shorter, table of Sa'adiyyah Gaon's (d. 949, 68 years after Kindi) in his *Sa'adiyyah Gaon On The Influence of Music* (p. 9), and it shows the influence of Kindi. Colors and scents are included in that chart. We did not include them here for reasons given in our chapter on Kindi. (See *supra*, p. 33).

‘ŪD STRINGS	<i>AL-ZĪR</i>	<i>AL-MATHNĀ</i>	<i>AL-MATHLATH</i>	<i>AL-BAMM</i>
<i>FALAK QTRS</i>	Mid-sky to sunset point	Sunset point to sunrise point	Sunrise point to fourth sky	Qtr sky to seventh
ASTROLOGICAL QTRS	Cancer to Virgo	Aries to Gemini	Libro to Sagittarius	Capricorn to Pisces
MOON QTRS	Full	Crescent	Third Qtr	Right qtr-gone
4 ELEMENTS	Fire	Air	Earth	Water
WINDS	Southerly	Easterly	Northerly	Westerly
SEASONS	Summer	Spring	Autumn	Winter
MONTH QTRS	7th-14th	1st-7th	14th-21st	21st-end
DAY QTRS	Noon to sunset	Sunrise to noon	Midnight to sunrise	Sunset to midnight
HUMORS	Yellow bile	Blood	Black bile	Phlegm
AGES OF MAN	Infancy	Youth	Middle age	Old age
MENTAL PRS	Rational	Imaginative	Retentive	Memorative
ORGANS	Heart	Liver	Brain	Testicles
TRAITS/ACTS	Courage	Generosity	Cowardice	Patience
RHYTHM	<i>Mākhūrī</i>	<i>Thaqīl</i> I, II	Heavy extended	<i>Hajaz, ramal, khafif</i>
POEM	Bold	Sad	Soothing	Cheerful
MELODY	Strong, masculihne		Weak, feminine	
COMPOSITION	Expansive		Contractive	Moderate
THERAPEUTIC INDICATIONS	Strengthen yellow bile quiet phlegm	Strengthen blood, quiet black bile	Strngthen phlegm quiet yellow bile	Strengthen black bile, cool blood

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